

Promotor      Prof. dr. Koen Stroeken

Decaan        Prof. dr. Marc Boone

Rector        Prof. dr. Anne De Paepe





Faculteit Letteren & Wijsbegeerte

Ngade Ivo Ntiege Mesumbe

# **Social connectivity and HIV risk behavior**

*Mobile phones and sexuality  
in Yaoundé youth culture*

Proefschrift voorgelegd tot het behalen van de graad van  
Doctor in de Afrikaanse Talen en Culturen

2014



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	i
LIST OF TABLES .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
SUMMARY .....	ix
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....	xi
DISSERTATION OUTLINE.....	xiii
<b>Chapter 1: General research background and fieldwork .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>1.1. General introduction.....</i>	<i>1</i>
1.1.1. HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa: what are the causes? .....	2
1.1.2. HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa: what are the figures? .....	6
1.1.3. Overview of HIV/AIDS in Cameroon .....	8
1.1.4. Relevance of the study to public health .....	13
1.1.5. Achieving social goals at the era of new communication technology in Cameroon .....	16
1.1.6. Description of Yaoundé and its opportunities for young people .....	19
1.1.7. My interest in the study of HIV/AIDS and sexual risk behaviors .....	22
1.1.8. Sources of motivations for further research .....	25
1.1.9. Young people and community networks.....	26
<i>1.2. Literature review of research based in Yaoundé .....</i>	<i>27</i>
<b>Chapter 2. Research methodology .....</b>	<b>37</b>
2.1. Sampling.....	38
2.2. Hypothesis .....	40
2.3. Designing research questions .....	40
2.4. Data collection methods.....	45
2.4.1. Documentation search strategy .....	45

2.4.2. Ethnographic fieldwork method (Phase 1) .....	48
<b>Chapter 3: Theoretical framework .....</b>	<b>79</b>
3.1. <i>Network theory</i> .....	79
3.1.1. Social network analysis conceptual framework.....	80
3.1.2. The social impact worldview from mobile phone network analysis.....	82
3.1.3. Anthropological concept to social network .....	84
3.1.4. Explaining the concepts of sexual risk in network theory .....	87
3.2. <i>Culture theory</i> .....	90
3.2.1. The concept of modernity in new communication technology and sexuality .....	90
3.2.2. Understanding young people, sexuality and new communication technology from youth culture concepts.....	91
3.2.3. Understanding mobile phone risk behaviors from cultural epidemiology and the causal assemblage paradigms.....	97
3.2.4. Understanding risky sexual behavior from mobile phone usage through a comparative study model .....	99
<b>Chapter 4: HIV sexual risk behavior in the era of new communication technology in Cameroon .....</b>	<b>101</b>
4.1. <i>New communication technology, youth culture and sexuality in Yaoundé</i> .....	104
4.2. <i>Anthropological approach to sexual activities</i> .....	104
4.3. <i>The risk for HIV infection among young people</i> .....	105
4.4. <i>Courtship through mobile phone usage</i> .....	105
4.5. <i>Risk involved in mboma-young girl relationships from Weeks' point of view</i> .....	108
4.6. <i>Sexual risk behaviors at the Office of Schools and University Sports of Cameroon (OSUSC)</i> .....	109
4.7. <i>Remarks on casual and transactional sexual activities at the era of communication technology</i> .....	111
4.8. <i>Mobile phone usage in urban life: Public health implication</i> .....	112
4.9. <i>Proposing behavior change through prevention by mediated communication</i> .....	113
<b>Chapter 5: Yaoundé data: Results and Analysis .....</b>	<b>117</b>
5.1. <i>Yaoundé's bar, nightclubs and restaurants</i> .....	117
5.1.1. Analysis of the data from Green Valley Bar .....	118
5.1.2. Djeuga and Katios nightclubs.....	119
5.1.3. Data collected at restaurant Grassland resto .....	123
5.2. <i>Observational data on changing culture due to mobile phone use</i> .....	124
5.2.1. Beeping through mobile phones as a new form of greeting and experiencing sexuality.....	125

5.2.2. Mobile phone “call boxes” as emerging sources of livelihood .....	126
5.3. Data results from focus group discussions in Yaoundé.....	129
5.4. Data concerning discussions with specialized informants (high school staff) .....	138
5.5. Data results from questionnaires at Yaoundé 1 & Yaoundé 2 Universities .....	144
5.5.1. Social connectivity and safe sex communication .....	146
5.5.2. Assessing background profile to predict social connectivity .....	151
5.6. Social connectivity in function of risk group .....	154
<b>Chapter 6: Cross-cultural comparative study (Ghent and Yaoundé) .....</b>	<b>157</b>
6.1. Comparison of mobile phone usage at socially-dominated places where young people enjoy their lives.....	158
6.1.1. Mobile phone usage and sexual risk behaviors in bars compared (Green Valley Bar and Overpoort Bowl Bar/café).....	158
6.1.2. Mobile phone usage and sexual risk behaviors in nightclubs compared (Katios and Djeuga versus Decadence).....	159
6.2. Comparison of mobile phone usage of beeping related to sexuality.....	160
6.3. Comparison of mobile phone usage in relation to mobile phone call boxes and sexuality .....	161
6.4. Comparing the rates of risk behaviors (alcohol drinking and smoking among peers) and mobile phones facilitation of clustering such behaviors.....	161
6.5. Acknowledging if the gift for sex practice is OK.....	164
6.6. Previous sexual relation.....	166
6.6.1. Partner concurrency .....	166
6.6.2. Intergenerational sexual relationships .....	167
6.7. The discussion about condoms with sexual partners.....	168
6.8. Other socio-cultural differences on sexuality among young people in Ghent and Yaoundé .....	169
6.8.1. Explaining mobile phone sexual risk behaviors following Evans-Pritchard's inquiry on witchcraft.....	170
6.8.2. Does the government need to re-evaluate the law on witchcraft in relation to AIDS related death? .....	171
<b>GENERAL CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>177</b>

**ANNEXE 1 .....195**

**ANNEXE 2 .....205**

**ANNEXE 3 .....211**

**ANNEXE 4 .....217**



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Number of adults and children living with HIV(1991 - 2011) .....	9
Table 2: Sample research questions and response types .....	43
Table 3: Sample participant generation code for university students (Yaoundé) .....	55
Table 4: Sample participant generation code for high school students (Yaoundé).....	56
Table 5: Participants composition during FGDs in Yaoundé.....	71
Table 6: Responses from high school students in Yaoundé.....	130
Table 7: Prediction the association between connectivity and sexual life partners.....	144
Table 8: RSB & social connectivity matrix.....	145
Table 9: Prediction of SCs and SLPs in the four RSB groups .....	146
Table 10: Prediction of RSB within the four RSB groups .....	147
Table 11: Demonstrating participants' demographic background variables.....	151
Table 12: Demonstrating participants' background variables .....	152
Table 13: Places where young people enjoy (socialize) in Yaoundé & Gent .....	158
Table 14:Percentage comparison of RSB in Ghent & Yaoundé .....	162



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Opportunistic infections distribution in sub-Saharan Africa .....	4
Figure 2: Map of Yaoundé indicating research sites .....	22
Figure 3: Map of Cameroon showing the position of Yaoundé .....	35
Figure 4: Arrow diagram showing the search strategy.....	46
Figure 5: Example of two mobile phones use to cope with, and manage, multi-sexual relationships	122
Figure 6: Mobile phone call boxes along the street in Yaoundé .....	127
Figure 7: Sample mobile phone (MTN) airtime credit .....	128
Figure 8: Social connectivity and social goals flow .....	142
Figure 9: Participants' age and social connectivity/social goals differences .....	143



## SUMMARY

This study is about changing culture. It deals with the acquisition of a mobile phone by young people in Yaoundé (Cameroon), its level of usage or of social connectivity, and the role it might have in HIV transmission. I examine how the use of a mobile phone impacts courtship, and how it creates and facilitates not only flirtatious behavior, but also unwanted sexual solicitations. Data results prove that young people embark on social connectivity to attain three social goals, (1) to increase longer-term life chances, (2) to increase means to gain material support and (3) to increase means to maintain self-status in the eyes of peers. They use mobile phones to create social ties that might result in sexual relations where barriers to condom use are involved, and as such it might lead to unsafe sexual encounters. Due to the economic and socio-cultural factors that obstruct the communication for safer sex between young people and their sexual partners – especially sugar daddies/mummies or *mbomas* – the power to enforce condom use is rarely equal. Data results prove that in Yaoundé, young people's risky sexual practices are exacerbated by the *mboma* syndrome. Through a cross-cultural conceptual approach, I compare sexual risk behaviors related to the use of mobile phone among young people of Yaoundé with those of Ghent (Belgium), enabling me to assess distinctive sexual values that exist in different cultural backgrounds. Drawing from theoretical perspectives about the importance of cross-cultural research on HIV, I present data on different sexual values and norms in Yaoundé and Ghent that can be useful to HIV intervention and prevention policies, especially youth-oriented healthcare programs. The study focuses on young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who study at the following high schools and universities of Yaoundé: *Lycée de Mendong*, *Lycée d'Efoulan*, *Lycée Bilingue d'Application* (LBA), Yaoundé 1 University and Yaoundé 2 University. In all, field research took 6 months; 5 months in Yaoundé and 1 month in Ghent, and consisted of mixed methods for collecting data. Among the high school students, the interviews (questionnaires and focus group discussions) were orally conducted, face-to-face and written out in real time by the interviewer, which permitted direct monitoring of and by the respondent. Among the university students, both in Yaoundé and in Ghent, the questionnaires were handed out and filled in by the students. An additional qualitative survey, which entailed participant

observation, informal interactions and conversations with key informants, was conducted to create a systematic record of their everyday life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This dissertation is part of four years of sacrifice both in Ghent and in Yaoundé. Obstacles have been many. Nevertheless, the sacrifice has not only been mine but the commitment of many people who thought they have a duty to change my life. To begin with, this dissertation could not be realized in any way if it were not for the counseling and financial support of my doctoral supervisor - Professor Koen Stroeken of the University of Ghent (UGhent). Indeed, I am highly indebted to him not just now but throughout my life. I want to point out my sincere gratitude to Professor Felix Kaputu (UGent), who came midway from Boston into this dissertation and finally exercised his commitment as someone who is ready to support a wall when it needs more people to help it stand erect. Professor Merrill Singer of the University of Connecticut also came a quarter ways to become what uconn anthropology students called “my uconn adviser.” He mentored me throughout a summer in Connecticut while I was writing this dissertation. I thank him wonderfully for this dissertation. Apart from the trio mentioned above, several other people contributed to make this dissertation what it is today. First, I want to thank Dr. Annelies Verdoolaege (UGent) for all her support within four years of my research at UGent. Secondly, my gratitude goes to Dr. Kristien Geenen (UGent) who took her valuable time to carry out thorough review that has finally made this dissertation what it is now. I want to thank Professor Michael Meeuwis (UGent) for his support, especially his advice most of the times. My gratitude goes to Joris Baeyens and Emeritus Professor Kabuta formerly of African Languages and Cultures. I thank Maaïke Goethals for her technical and logistic support not only to me but my doctoral peers of the African Languages and Cultures. I thank Professor Gilles Maurice, Professor Sigurd D’hondt and Professor Mena Lafkiou, Karine Van Bommel, Dieter Devos, Jasper De Kind, Ernest, Ferdinand and Dr. Hilde Cuppens. I thank my ever loving sister Pamela Ngade, her husband Ellah Sammy, then Reverend Pastor Kang Alobwede plus his wife Sporah Nlende Alobwede and retired Captain Sone Manfred for their financial support throughout my studies in Cameroon. Thanks to my beloved nieces Charlis Ellah, Pelagie Mbangé Ellah, Veronique Esung and Raissa Ellah, my ever best nephew Rogers Ewane, cousin Grace Ekume Mesumbe, step sister Senze Ngade and step brother Alex Ngade. I want to thank my roommates; namely: Zachery Singer, Lucas Proctor, Nic Blegen, Stephen Lyons who treated me so well during my

six months study at the University of Connecticut (USA). I cannot forget to thank colleagues from the department of anthropology at the University of Connecticut such as Marie Brault, Erica Philips, Madeleine Von Bayer, Jacqueline Meier, Rich Colon, Siavash Samei, William Tootle and David Lesley. I also want to mention the warm treatment I received at the Center for Health, Intervention and Prevention (CHIP) where I actually did my six months study at the University of Connecticut. There, my special thanks go to Professor Seth Kalichman, Lara Smith, Emily Tuthill, David Finitsis, Kaylee Burhnam and Susan Hoge. In Belgium, I want to thank the Kupe-Muanenguba cultural group, especially the president Kome Nelson Ebong and his wife Kome Mirabel, Nange Masango, Pali Mpako Masango, Epitime Epie Denis, Ebong Divine, Ewane Sylvanus, Abande Linus, Ekwelle Ajang, Esoh Peter, Auntie Dione Sume, Sume Bryce, Ebong Epie, Diabe Anthony, Koge Ndille and Epie'Ngole. I thank this friend and PhD colleague - Elong Eric for our cooperation in research. I also thank many friends in Ghent, namely Greenfield Mufor, Gilbert, Larry Babot, Mala Mufor, Eric Schotte, Mercy Wirkom, Collins Fondeson, Emade, Clementine Tikum, Jennifer Acham, Neville Tita and John Ngwa. I want to thank my late parents - Christina Mundor Nnoko and Benjamin Ngade and my grand-father - Petro Ntiege. My gratitude to friends in Cameroon, namely: Adolf Ekane, Ndille Frankline, Bertrand Ndzana and Souh Viviane. Finally, I want to acknowledge the support from Florentine and my two treasures (kids) Medrie Mundor and Eric Ntiege.



# DISSERTATION OUTLINE

This dissertation is divided into six chapters, followed by the general conclusions, the bibliography and the annex section. Chapter 1 outlines the background of this research, beginning with an introduction on mobile phone use among young people, and how mobile phones as social network devices may lead to sexual risk behaviors through the social connectivity they enable to create. Next, I provide a brief blueprint of the predictors of, and the prevalence in, HIV in Africa and Cameroon. Then I emphasize how an anthropological inquiry of mobile phone usage and sexual flirtation, in harmony with an epidemiological one, may contribute to identify further behaviors that fuel the risk of HIV contamination among young people, and I put forward the need for such an inquiry by presenting the relevance of mobile phone usage and sexuality research to public health. I also argue that our knowledge of sexual risk behavior through the use of mobile phones could be considerably increased if we would pay attention to the three social goals which push youngsters along their life, (1) to gain material support, (2) to increase self-status in the eyes of peers and (3) to achieve longer-term social goals. I conclude chapter 1 with an overview of relevant literature on HIV in Cameroon, which in turn enables me to locate the gap I want to fill in with this study.

In Chapter 2, I enter into details of the methodology of this study. I first explain which sampling technique, hypothesis and research questions I applied and why I did so. I proceed with an elaboration on my search for relevant literature, which took me from the libraries of Ghent University to online libraries such as JSTOR, PubMed and Google Scholar. Next I outline how I collected empirical data through ethnographic fieldwork both in Yaoundé and in Ghent, including the procedures I applied (how, when, for who and what) and the challenges I faced. These fieldwork methods included focus groups discussions (FGDs), participant observation, informal interviews and questionnaires.

Chapter 3 contains a detailed analysis of this study's theoretical framework. I divide the chapter into two broad sections, namely: one on the Network Theory and another on Cultural Theory. In the first part, I emphasize how through the social network analysis conceptual framework, researchers identified patterns of disease spread, especially the modes of HIV/STDs transmission. I argue that in the same way, paying attention to mobile phone

acquisition and usage, this research can lead to the development of a mediated communication theory that will help, in the future, to map HIV risk behaviors among young people in Yaoundé and Cameroon in general. I lay initial emphasis on the possibility of an anthropological contribution of this new theory by referring to earlier anthropological studies that employed the social network analysis as main framework while analyzing disease spread. In particular, I cite the works of famous anthropologists as Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss and outline how current renowned anthropologists, especially Robert Thornton, use the social network analysis to explain patterns of HIV transmission in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, in this section I also refer to the different worldviews and phenomena that previous and contemporary research employs to sustain the explanation of risk in networks. In the same way, I show how these worldviews and phenomena inform my study on the issue of HIV risk behaviors, as we can consider mobile phones as social network devices that raise risk-taking through the social connectivity they establish in young people's sexual lives.

In the second part of Chapter 3, I present theoretical outlooks that can help us to understand mobile phones and their usage as cultural devices and as cultural practices respectively. I proceed by explaining how mobile phone usage and sexuality can be understood through the frameworks of modernity and through existing theories on youth cultures. I also emphasize how medical anthropologists as Merrill Singer and James Trostle, Frederick Dunn and Janes Crane, recommend to apply contemporary paradigms such as the 'causal assemblages' and 'cultural epidemiology' in cooperation with epidemiology in order to analyze the socio-cultural predictors of disease spread. Finally, I demonstrate the relevance of applying a *comparative approach* theoretical framework while examining sexual risk behaviors; in this study's case: the cultural contexts of Yaoundé and of Ghent. I put forward previous theories of comparative inquiry to support the importance of a cross-cultural assessment of risk behaviors, as it leads to a possible way to establish locally-appropriate HIV prevention programs.

In Chapter 4, I sketch the historical overview of mobile telephony in Cameroon and argue that mobile phone usage sprang into matters of sexuality. Through a linguistic and an anthropological lens, I explain how the coinage of mobile phone usage into sexuality and youth culture came about in Cameroon, and more particularly in Yaoundé. I mention possible prevention of disease spread through behavior change.

Chapter 5 includes an analysis of the data collected in Yaoundé, both at high schools and at universities. I present the risk behaviors that emerged since the appearance of mobile phones. For example, I touch upon the use of two mobile phones as a convenience to manage

several sexual relations at the same time, and upon the beeping practice as a networking practice that facilitates sexual encounters among young people. Finally, my analysis shows that mobile phones enable to put up a network of elder people that youths get involved with, exchanging sexual intercourse to achieve the three social goals I have discerned.

In chapter 6, I compare data on sexual risk behaviors among young people in Ghent and those in Yaoundé. I outline the sites where social activities such as partying develop, explore where and in which circumstances young people use their mobile phones to socialize and finally how mobile phones therefore facilitate the execution of risks during these socializations.

Finally, I present my general conclusions followed by a list of references and the annexes. The conclusions stress on the main findings and subscribe future directions concerning mobile phone usage and sexual facilitation research. The list of references indicate the important documents that I used in supporting my arguments on mobile phone usage and the need for a cultural versus health-related attention. The annexes begin with a detailed outline of the responses of participants in high schools in Yaoundé tabulated in Table 6. Next, I present the questionnaires used during fieldwork in Ghent and Yaoundé. The last annex comprises a sample of the authorizations to (a) collect data issued to me during fieldwork in Yaoundé, and (b) to have access to Yaoundé 1 University library.



# **Chapter 1: General research background and fieldwork**

## **1.1. General introduction**

This study is about changing culture, the acquisition of mobile phones among young people, and the role mobile phones, including their level of usage (specifically connectivity), may have in HIV transmission in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The use of mobile phones not only creates new ways of social networking which accelerate the pace of social tie development, it also facilitates sexual flirtation and permissive sexual activities. Furthermore, the hypothesized causes why mobile phones play a role in increasing social connectivity and sexual activities, are tied to youngsters' social goals, which are to gain material support, to improve personal status and to offer longer term life chances.

To illuminate the specific local and cultural features that link mobile phones to HIV infection in Yaoundé, the study compares risk behaviors associated with mobile phone-mediated social networking among young people in Yaoundé, Cameroon, with risk behaviors related to mobile phones in Ghent, Belgium<sup>1</sup>. The aim of this comparative study is to investigate distinctive risk behaviors among youth in two seemingly-contrastive cultural settings. Social science researchers have long underscored the importance of assessing cross-cultural differences in risk behavior, particularly in the development of locally appropriate HIV intervention (Parker et al. 1991). This research seeks to put this ideal into practice.

Connectivity is a property of social networks. Connectivity, as used in network studies, refers to the actual number of links between people in a network relative to the possible number of links. Based on this definition, this study seeks to reveal social pathways of possible HIV transmission by investigating whether the risk within sexual networks depends on the density of social and intimate connections (see Thornton 2008, Stroeken et al. 2012). Modern communication technology raises the level of connectivity within social groups and as such has the capacity to raise the level of risk. Up until now, however, the

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<sup>1</sup> Gent, written "Ghent" in English, is the capital of Belgium's province of East Flanders. It is located in the Flemish community of Belgium.

social role of mobile phones relative to sexual behaviors has received little attention in Cameroon, the country of main concern in this study.

A connectivity approach is, in part, one way through which anthropological research may go beyond specific clinical inquiry on the determinants of health in Cameroon. Basic applied and medical anthropology enables to scrutinize the ways through which social media, in particular mobile phones, enhance the risk of HIV transmission inherent to maintaining multiple sexual relationships. This anthropological approach may broaden our understanding of the interactive character of mobile communication, more exactly of how it possibly enhances flirtation as a sexual risk factor for HIV transmission, especially among youth.

In Cameroon, as elsewhere, when HIV is mentioned, various feelings, most often fear and pity, invade our innermost being. We fear the risk of being infected and at the same time we pity those who are infected. Nevertheless, people choose to engage in sexual behaviors that put them at risk not only of unintended pregnancies, but also of STDs as HIV/AIDS. In spite of the knowledge it has generated about disease risks due to unsafe sexual behavior, epidemiological inquiry seems to have neglected certain practices that portend significant health hazards. One such emerging, yet thus far largely neglected phenomenon, is mobile phone use. This is noteworthy in the light of the considerable recent attention that internet use did get as a factor in HIV risk behavior, which stands in stark contrast to the attention paid to mobile phone use. Nevertheless, just as the internet, mobile phones have rapidly become part of Cameroonian mainstream culture too, and it signals both attitude and value changes in the country's youth culture. And although mediated-communication today simplifies having multi-sexual contacts, its impact still receives minor attention of public health research in Cameroon. In the next section, I present an overview of the spread of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular.

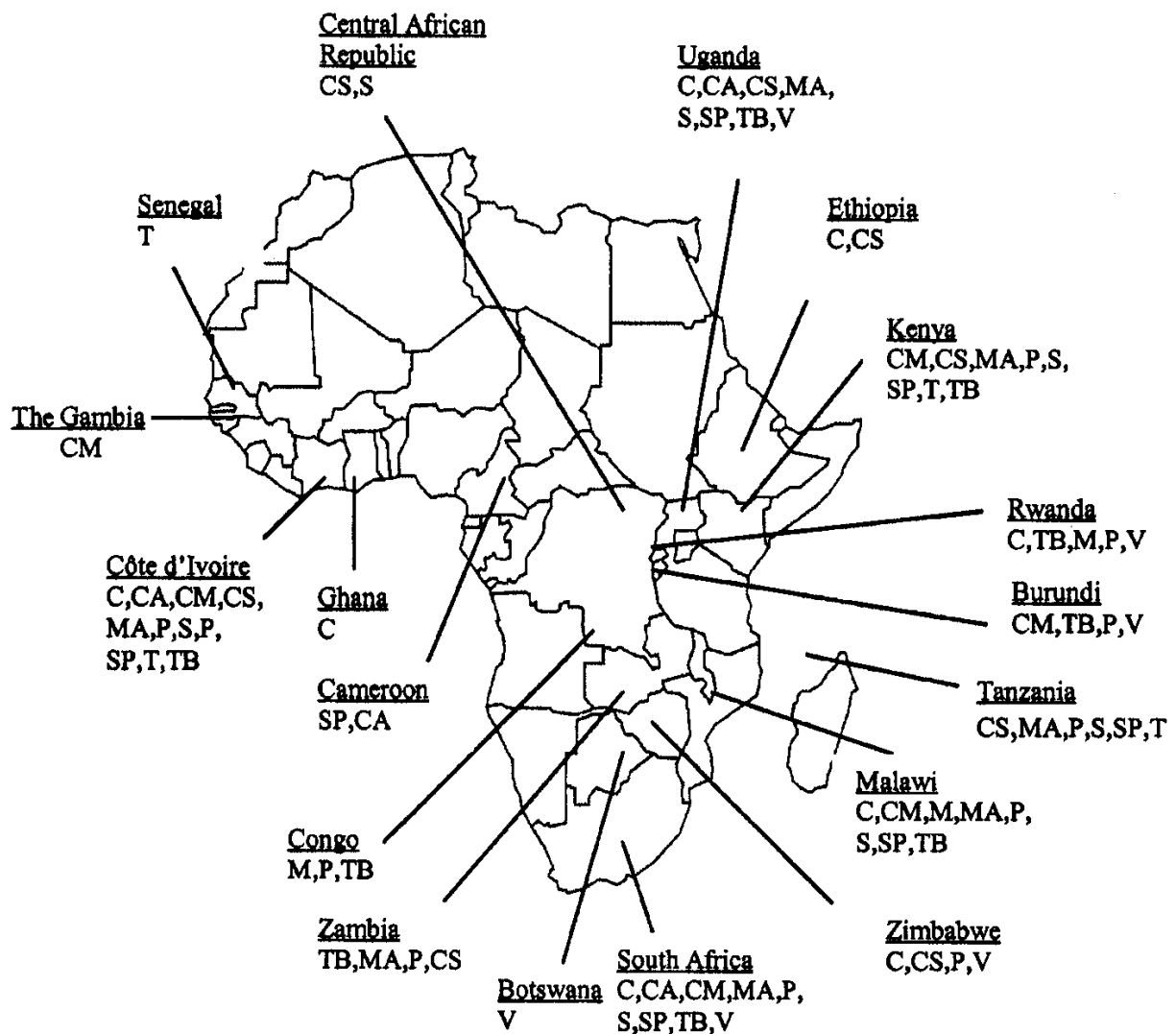
#### **1.1.1. HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa: what are the causes?**

Sub-Saharan Africa had, and still has, the highest number of HIV infections around the world, that is, about 70% of the global total. The main modes of transmission in this region are heterosexual sex, homosexual sex among males, and injection drug use (UNAIDS 1998, UNAIDS 2000). There are several factors associated with risk of HIV infection in Africa, and Poku (2005) identifies four primary drivers: biological, socio-political, socio-economic, and cultural factors.

The first of these factors, the biological ones, involve for instance infants' acquisition of human immunodeficiency virus type 1 (HIV) infection from their HIV-infected mothers, also known as mother-to-child transmission (MCT). One line of inquiry for MCT of HIV concentrates on timing and rate. As for timing, De Cock et al. (2002) note that mother-to-child transmission occurs during intrapartum periods or postnatally through breast milk. As for rate, studies indicate an increasing rate of MCT due to the "lack of medications like zidovudine (AZT) among HIV-infected pregnant women" (Wiktor 1999, and De Cock et al. 2002). An additional line of inquiry on the biological factors focuses on opportunistic infections. Holmes et al. (2003:659) mention that many of the infections to which HIV-1-infected individuals are susceptible, are widely spread across sub-Saharan Africa (see Figure 1). As for Cameroon, Holmes et al. (2003) report two opportunistic infections, *Candida albicans* and *Streptococcus pneumonia*, although others also are present<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Still in Cameroon, biological causes of HIV/AIDS transmission are one of the most important areas of inquiry among scholars. Many evolution-based researchers, from a biological perspective, relate the transmission of simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV) or African green monkey virus (GMV) to chimpanzees, gorillas, and mandrills to humans in Equatorial Africa. Pursuing this line of inquiry, Calattini et al. (2004), using samples of 44 wild-caught apes and monkeys, 27 gorillas, 11 mandrills, and 6 drills from Cameroon and Gabon, examined the presence of simian foamy retroviruses (SFRs). Brennan et al. (1997), Corbet et al. (2000), Muller-Trutwin et al. (2000), Courgnaud et al. (2001) and Aghokeng et al. (2004, 2006, 2007) provide further support for the existing notion that this region was one of places where earliest transmission of the simian lentivirus to human took place. Despite the extent of HIV/AIDS research being conducted in this area; many people still do not prove having adequate knowledge on HIV/AIDS; especially with witchcraft beliefs. In fact, many individuals in these communities continue to believe in local cultural knowledge about well-being and death. Many believe that those who are young cannot die of diseases, and if they do fall ill, it is attributed to witchcraft. These attitudes about illness and well-being prevent them from seeking accurate information about diseases in general and HIV/AIDS in particular, as the latter has only become a factor in relatively recent years.



**Figure 1: Opportunistic infections distribution in sub-Saharan Africa**

Source: Holmes and co-workers (2003:654)

Secondly, Poku discerns socio-political factors causing the spread of HIV/AIDS. Researchers who analyze these socio-political factors in sub-Saharan Africa, focus on two different sub-domains. The first emphasizes the role of political civil strife, which conditions risk and heightens HIV transmission rates (see Buve et al. 2002, Parker 2002, Hunter 2007). In particular, Buvé et al. (2002:2015) mention that “wars in Africa are conducive to the rapid spread of HIV.” During conflicts, civilians are subjected to physical violence and human rights abuses, including sexual violence. On top of that, war is a condition that might lead to paid survival sex, especially when faced with poverty. Furthermore, researchers have paid attention to global structural factors for HIV transmission through social injustice and the lack of human rights. For example, Singer and Erickson (2013:26) emphasize the “conditions



in which people live and work... that affect their opportunities to lead healthy lives,” and De Cock (2002) notes the “unfair distribution of society’s benefits, national laws, plus access to medical care.” Farmer (1996:275), using the lens of “structural violence,” explores gender-related causes of HIV deaths. He mentions that women throughout the world are ideologically designated as inferior to men, a belief that gives men power, contributes to women being victims of domestic violence and rape, and subsequently vulnerable to HIV infection.

Thirdly, Poku points out the socio-economic causes of HIV/AIDS in Africa. Socio-economic research on HIV transmission focuses on poverty and other socio-economic variables for health vulnerability. Examples are female and infant poverty in male-dominated social structures, and “hidden hunger” (Singer and Erickson, 2013:71) caused by gender-based inequalities in access to food. Singer and Erickson (2013:67) define food insecurity as “the relation between food and people’s survival and well-being.” Both Singer and Erickson (2013) and Gillespie et al. (2007) confirm that in many parts of the world, women are responsible for feeding the family. This explains why their lessened power has extreme implications for the survival of their family members and raises the pressure for survival sex. Indeed, due to “food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa” (Gillespie et al. 2007), women resort to transactional sex to procure food for themselves and their children, and by doing so they increase sexual risk taking.

Finally, Poku emphasizes the cultural practices that either jeopardize or protect reproductive health in Africa. Poku’s cultural paradigm, which counters the “dominant biological explanations of health” (Sobo 2011), incorporates the alternatives that anthropologists use to express concerns about health. In particular, anthropologists pay attention to aspects of human experience, local understandings and culturally shaped behaviors responsible for HIV transmission (Singer and Erickson 2013). The 1990s marked anthropological engagement into local socio-cultural practices in order to provide “adequate understanding of the social dimension of HIV and AIDS” (Parker 2001:166). This line of inquiry enhances the health-belief model which highlights the local beliefs that hinder the use of condoms in Africa<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Hounton, Carabin and Henderson’s (2006) definition of the health-belief model is as follows: “The health-belief model postulates that an individual’s actions are based on beliefs.”

Cultural factors are also at play in HIV risk among young people. Cameroonian youth now participates in many aspects of what has become a global youth culture, since they entered the realms of modern communication technology, where the use of internet and mobile phones prevail. These new technologies bring along behaviors that, in turn, have an impact on their sexual practices. Cameroonian youths' involvement in these emergent social worlds is influenced by their cultural heritage, including the ways they perceive, adopt, and use these new technologies, as this study will show.

### **1.1.2. HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa: what are the figures?**

In this section, I present HIV figures for sub-Saharan Africa from 1998 until 2011, a period extended enough to fully capture the socio-cultural factors responsible for its transmission. In general, the HIV/AIDS topic was only very gradually taken into account during the first decade of its discovery (1980 – 1990). Anthropologists, for instance, for the most part joined HIV/AIDS research only from the 1990s onwards, which is probably the reason why previous health reports did hardly include any socio-cultural aspects of HIV/AIDS transmission. Furthermore, development agencies responsible for publishing global health reports, such as UNAIDS, “underestimated the potential magnitude of HIV/AIDS in Africa in 1980s” (Schoepf 2004:16). Schoepf wonders why it took so long for the international community to realize the potential spread of the AIDS pandemic. According to UNAIDS (1998:5), the HIV/AIDS epidemic started in sub-Saharan Africa in late 1970s and early 1980s. However, according to Hooper et al. (1998), the oldest blood samples were obtained in Africa as far back as 1959. Today, HIV is even thought to have appeared for the first time in the early 20th century already.

#### 1998 - 2000

The UNAIDS report of 1998 points out that by end 1998, 25.3 million children and adults were living with HIV/AIDS, 4.0 million were newly infected, the adult incidence rate stood at 8.0%, with 50% of HIV positive adults being women. A following report by UNAIDS (2005:5) indicates that by late 2000, 25.3 million children were living with HIV/AIDS, 3.8 million were newly infected, the adult incidence rate standing at 8.8%, with 55% of HIV positive adults being women.

### 2001 - 2008

In a subsequent report by UNAIDS (2009), statistics indicate that the number of people living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa increased from 19.7 million in 2001 to 22.4 million in 2008. However, the number of new infections dropped from 2.3 million in 2001 to 1.9 million in 2008. The number of children newly infected decreased from 460,000 in 2001 to 390,000 in 2008. The number of AIDS-related deaths remained the same – 1.4 million in both 2001 and 2008.

### 2009 - Present

In 2009, 22.5 million children and adults were living with HIV/AIDS, 1.8 million are newly infected, adult incidence rate standing at 5.0%, with 1.3 million HIV related deaths (UNAIDS 2010:23). In 2010, an estimated 1.9 million people were newly infected with HIV, the prevalence of HIV infection among adults during that year was 5.0%, child and adult AIDS-related deaths stood at 1,200,000; overall, 22.9 million people were living with HIV during that year. Other reports state that HIV prevalence among young people aged 15 – 24 years was 1.4% for men and 3.3% for women, and between 1,700,000 and 2,100,000 people became infected in 2010 (UNICEF, 2010, WHO, 2010, and UNAIDS Progress report 2011:49).

The latest UNAIDS report (2012) shows there is a decline in new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths in sub-Saharan Africa. This decline stands at 25% based on an estimated 1.8 million people newly infected with HIV, compared to 2.4 million newly infected people in 2001 (ten years earlier).

A WHO report (2011) on HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa shows that 7% of the women infected with HIV reported that they had been paid for sex. By contrast, 31% of men infected with HIV reported they had paid for having sex (WHO 2011). However, HIV transmission among young people has been mainly due to a failure to adopt identified healthy behaviors. HIV/AIDS data for Cameroon as well as the country's different responses to the epidemic, are presented in the next section.

### 1.1.3. Overview of HIV/AIDS in Cameroon

According to UNICEF (2001), by the year 2000, both Cameroon (11.8%) and the Central African Republic (12.9%) recorded the highest HIV prevalence rates of Central West Africa. UNICEF (2001) particularly emphasized that the highest rate of infection was found among young Cameroonian people. These high rates may account for Cameroon's implementation of a behavior-based strategy to promote healthy lifestyles and as such minimize the risk for HIV/AIDS infection. Table 1 illustrates the number of adults and children living with HIV/AIDS, and HIV/AIDS prevalence rates of adults, from 1990 until 2011.

The figures show a rapid increase from 1 to 5% HIV prevalence among sexually mature adolescents and adults (between the ages of 15 and 49) in the decade between 1990 and 2000. The rates grew annually with 0.4% on average. After the peak of 5.2% stagnated between 2002 and 2004, there was a slow but gradual decline, 0.1% per year, four times slower than the increase in the 1990s. With 4.6% in 2011, Cameroon is still a quite highly affected zone though and, going by the current rate, will remain so until at least 2025 (3%). The relevant question concerning our research then becomes: might anything be preventing the decline in incidences? Might mobile phone use be a causal factor, by raising the social connectivity of people? Of course, the mere raise of social connectivity need not imply more HIV incidences. But there is something particular about the mobile phone, namely the privacy of communication, that makes it liable to stimulate a certain type of social connectivity: sexual connectivity. That link between mobile phone use and raised sexual contacts is the first, general formulation of our research hypothesis.

Year	Estimated adults/ Children living with HIV	Estimated adults/ Children living with HIV	Estimated adults/ Children living with HIV	Adults (15 – 49) Prevalence %	Adults (15 – 49) % low estimate	Adults (15 –49) % high estimate
		-Low estimate	-High estimate			
1990	61 000	43 000	74 000	1.0	0.7	1.2
1991	85 000	63 000	100 000	1.4	1.0	1.6
1992	110 000	88 000	130 000	1.8	1.4	2.0
1993	150 000	120 000	170 000	2.2	1.8	2.5
1994	190 000	150 000	210 000	2.7	2.2	3.1

1995	230 000	190 000	260 000	3.2	2.7	3.6
1996	270 000	230 000	310 000	3.7	3.1	4.1
1997	310 000	270 000	350 000	4.1	3.6	4.5
1998	350 000	310 000	400 000	4.5	4.0	5.0
1999	390 000	350 000	440 000	4.8	4.3	5.3
2000	420 000	380 000	470 000	5.0	4.6	5.4
2001	450 000	410 000	500 000	5.1	4.7	5.6
2002	470 000	430 000	520 000	5.2	4.7	5.6
2003	490 000	440 000	540 000	5.2	4.8	5.6
2004	500 000	460 000	550 000	5.2	4.8	5.6
2005	520 000	470 000	570 000	5.1	4.8	5.5
2006	530 000	480 000	580 000	5.1	4.7	5.4
2007	540 000	490 000	580 000	5.0	4.6	5.3
2008	540 000	500 000	580 000	4.9	4.6	5.2
2009	550 000	510 000	590 000	4.8	4.5	5.1
2010	550 000	510 000	590 000	4.7	4.4	5.0
2011	550 000	510 000	600 000	4.6	4.3	5.0

**Table 1: Number of adults and children living with HIV(1991 - 2011)**

Source: UNAIDS Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic – 2012

#### ***1.1.3.1. Responding to the presence of HIV/AIDS in Cameroon: Initial steps***

In 1980, there were initial reports about HIV/AIDS among gay men in USA<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, knowledge about the existence of the deadly pandemic was slow in reaching Cameroon, it lasted until around 1985, when 21 sero-positive cases were documented (Ngole-Mpoudi et al. 2004:280). Thirteen years later, in 1998, the number of identified sero-positive cases had risen to 8,141(Ibid), and there were signs of further spread.

In 1986, and in response to the HIV pandemic, Cameroon's early intervention led to the creation of *La Comité Nationale du Lutte Contre le Sida* (CNLS), also known as The National Multi-sectorial Committee for the Fight Against AIDS (WHO 2005). CNLS coordinated and managed national activities meant to eradicate HIV/AIDS. To enhance the success of the eradication, the government established a partnership between CNLS and the global development agencies UNAIDS, WHO, UNDP, World Bank, UNICEF, French Cooperation and the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (WHO, 2005). As a result of this alliance and with the assistance of the American health metrics institute

<sup>4</sup> The network through which the HIV infection was spread, was revealed through the mapping of relationships between one of the first identified AIDS cases, an airline steward, and a large number of his male sex partners in the early 1980s. See also Ba (2008) on the first cases of new pneumonia in 1980 and in 1981, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) publishes first reports of a rare pneumonia affecting 5 gay men in Los Angeles.

called Macro International Inc. and the *Bureau Central des Recensements et Études des Population* (BUCREP) or the Central Bureau of Censuses and Population Studies, CNLS published the Cameroon Demographic and Health Survey (CDHS) report in 1998. Focusing on a representative sample of men and women aged 15- 49 years, this report proved that women and young people (15 – 24 years), rather than the other groups, were vulnerable. The CDHS report also confirmed that the greatest difficulty in the fight against HIV/AIDS, was the protection of young people, precisely due to their vulnerability. Vulnerability among youths accounts for an increase in HIV prevalence from 0.5% to 7.73% in 2000. Finally, the CDHS report provided impact assessment guidance on decision making regarding policies, programs, further plans and projects to monitor and evaluate HIV transmission in Cameroon.

Besides CNLS, other organizations such as the Cameroon National Association for Family Welfare (CAMNAFAW)<sup>5</sup> and the Chantal Biya Foundation (CBF)<sup>6</sup> provided healthcare facilities to prevent further transmission too. The latter provided, and continues to provide, healthcare facilities through its Mother and Child Unit in order to reduce mother-to-child HIV transmission (see Mbu et al. 2004, Sagnia et al. 2011, Chiabi et al. 2012). CAMNAFAW, unlike the Chantal Biya Foundation, “has been running a Health Program within which a Youth Clinic operates and offers fertility control facilities among other facilities for youths” (Njikam 2005:65). CAMNAFAW’s youth clinic explores health topics, such as AIDS, the relationship between boys and girls, and unwanted pregnancy, to “improve sexual and reproductive health among young people” (Njoh, 1996).

### ***1.1.3.2. On mobile phone and risky sexual behavior in Cameroon: Anthropology and social epidemiology***

Drawing a connection between young people’s risky sexual behavior (RSB) and their increased engagement in social media via the use of mobile phone, appears to be a complex matter. Yet, we propose that the use of social media constitutes one of Poku’s factors with

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<sup>5</sup> Cameroon National Association for Family Welfare (CAMNAFAW) is an NGO, through family life education, it encourages responsible parenthood in Cameroon. Target groups are parents and young people, young in-school and out-of-school people in urban and rural areas, reached through reproductive health programs and through the offering of lectures to adolescents on adolescent health at the organization's center every Wednesday afternoon.

<sup>6</sup> The Chantal Biya Foundation, created and sponsored by Cameroon’s first lady Chantal Biya, is a charitable NGO. Through its mother and child center, it is providing antiretroviral regimens to reduce mother-to-child transmission.

risk for HIV transmission, namely the cultural factor, comprising social behavior. Anthropological and social epidemiological frameworks may help to unveil this complexity and broaden our understanding of the impact of social connectivity. Social or behavioral epidemiology is defined as “the branch of epidemiology that studies the social distribution and social determinants of health” (Poundstone et al. 2004). This field of study deals with similar issues as medical anthropology, medical sociology, and medical geography. By unifying the approaches of anthropology and social epidemiology on the social impact of mediated-communication, we can effectively examine emerging patterns of contracting sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS (Inhorn 1995).

Researchers have been struggling to fortify cooperation between anthropology and social epidemiology (Trostle 1987, Trostle and Sommerfeld 1996). Integration of the two disciplines, research suggests, contributes to the creation of a new discipline, cultural epidemiology (Trostle 2005). James Trostle specifically envisages that cultural epidemiology will integrate the concept of culture into sets of explanatory variables, which epidemiologists use in defining disease. Sadly, differences in epistemological assumptions, methods of data collection, and notions of risk and responsibility for illness, have thus far hindered to close the gap between anthropology and social epidemiology.

Inhorn (1995), an anthropologist, points out five well-acknowledged areas of divergence that obstruct a synergy between medical anthropology and social epidemiology. I will outline the five areas of divergence below, and take advantage of these to introduce my own research as well.

(a) While epidemiologists bio-medically define disease, anthropologists study illness experiences, and in this research too, we follow the anthropological concern. We observe behavior as well, but go beyond the statistics on behavior and on rates of incidences, interviewing informants regarding their perception of risks and of disease. This perception is called “the illness experience.”

(b) Epidemiology is reductionist and positivistic, while anthropology is holistic and humanistic; in this research, too, we follow the anthropological concern. We consider the meaning people attribute to concepts of illness, and this intention not to reduce people to the objective figures, is humanistic. Moreover, meaning is shared through language, which is a collective framework, with concepts transmitted in groups and shared across society as a

whole. The meaning of one word, such as “HIV,” depends on all other words people relate it to. This is the holistic dimension of anthropology. It requires participant observation as part of qualitative research, and we applied this method.

(c) Epidemiology engages in narrow scientism, based largely on an inflated concern with the scientific method called “methodolatry” (Inhorn 1995:287) while anthropological inquiry is more naturalistic<sup>7</sup>. Anthropologists do not worship the randomized clinical trial as the only valid method of investigation, rather they distrust laboratory conditions and go out in the world, and so does this research.

(d) Epidemiology blames victims or diseases, especially their “behaviors and cultures” of which they are a part, but anthropologists *explain* these behaviors and cultures that bring people to the risk of diseases, and so does our research which, although behavioral, looks into culture and attitudinal models.

(e) And finally, epidemiology analyzes risks by medicalizing life and intervening, while anthropology critiques risks and attempts to alleviate human suffering by starting treatment from the human experience. So too does this research start from the reality of social connectivity, with mobile phone use as a part of it, and with sexual connectivity as a part of it too, without HIV taking the central stage. The HIV patient in a clinical setting is not our respondent.

In sum, these divergences result from the differences in empirical questions, epistemological assumptions, methods of data collection, responsibility for illness and conceptualization of risk. Nonetheless, a cooperation between social epidemiology and anthropology aligns with the social epidemiology framework of Poundstone et al. (2004:23) who believe that we need to find out what puts populations at risk for HIV epidemics and what population characteristics enhance vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

By examining the new ways of gifting that may entice young people to sexual engagements with multiple partners, anthropology may complement social epidemiology by raising awareness of the impact of social connectivity. Indeed, the synergy between anthropology and social epidemiology in understanding the risk for HIV transmission is not

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<sup>7</sup> In the same way as Inhorn (1995), Chamberlain (2000) has lamented how methodolatry is gaining privilege of methodological concerns over other considerations in qualitative health research. In his particular speech, he mentions that qualitative researchers are in danger of reifying methods in the same way as their colleagues in quantitative research have done for some time.



simply about multiple partners, per se, but also about how gift-giving practices may create obligations that can lead to HIV risk behaviors. The gift-giver might for instance impose the non-use of condoms as he/she feels this would disparage his/her sexual pleasure. In other words, the risk for HIV infection increases when these gifts contribute to risky liaisons between gift-givers and young people. Against this background, gift-giving practice from elder adults places youth populations at risk of the HIV epidemic.

The above discussion suggests that a synthesis of anthropological paradigms and social epidemiology may offer new insights concerning disease spread through social media, and consequently improve young people's reproductive health. Moreover, this syncretization paradigm might unravel the ways in which a changing culture – especially the modified gifting practices – may hinder sexual communication. Mobile phone use, I suggest, has even altered the traditional courting practices between sexual partners. Mediated-communication has usurped the place of hand-written love letters and traditional verbal messages to bring sexual partners into contact. Along with these changing traditional courting behaviors, mediated-communication has overshadowed previous ways of social interaction through “the often radically different understanding of sexual expression and practice in different societies and cultures” (Parker 2001:165). Therefore, epidemiological-anthropological attention might be a requisite to understand how the use of technology generates new hypotheses to study culture and disease.

#### **1.1.4. Relevance of the study to public health**

In this section, I reveal this study's relevance to public health in three different domains. Firstly, as mobile phones lead to an increased number of sexual encounters which in turn increases the risk of STD transmission, these devices are an issue that anyone involved with public health should take into account. Secondly, and ensuing the previous point, the disease spread is not halted at all, despite the many efforts undertaken, and the reason for this is precisely that mobile phones are neglected as social pattern of disease transmission. This study offers a way to curb the statistics, and to make the achievement of the MDGs more probable. Thirdly, this study clearly shows how new technologies lead to an increased connectivity and thus an increased risk, and recommends to integrate these new technologies to in prevention programs, as it enables to reach youths through their own means of communication.

#### ***1.1.4.1. On mobile phones and sexual facilitation***

Public health practitioners attempt to prevent new infections of sexually transmitted diseases by implementing behavior change policies, especially through encouraging safe sex practices (condom use) and discouraging having several partners. Mobile technology, which accelerates the pace of life today in a way unknown to Cameroon before the 1990's, is arguably one of the most challenging innovations that has elevated sexual encounters to a new level of frequency. This argument suggests that mobile phones can conveniently link two individuals who were previously unconnected, and subsequently play out their sexual desires. For example, one can imagine two individuals living 600 km and consequently a six hours drive away from each other (say one is living in Yaoundé and the other in Bamenda) easily establishing close social contact and express ties leading to future sexual intercourse, merely by using their mobile phones<sup>8</sup>. Obviously, during the era when there were no mobile phones nor internet, sexual contacts between individuals living that far one from the other, would have been highly unlikely.

So today, two individuals can establish social ties using the internet or mobile phones as proxies for sexual contacts. The crucial issue here is to envisage that this convenience provided by technology facilitates sexual encounters that, I suggest, would rather be avoided. Indeed, numerous risk behaviors nowadays would be avoided had it not been for the convenience created by use of technology into our everyday lives. Can we also envisage that the ubiquity of, and the communicative convenience created by, technology have contributed to increase the so-called “permissive sexual attitudes” that some researchers described in sub-Saharan Africa? Caldwell and co-workers (1989) have received numerous negative comments from colleagues for attributing the rapid spread of HIV in sub-Saharan Africa to what they call “a distinct African sexuality” that is inherently permissive. They argue that sexual attitudes, especially among males, are permissive precisely because of this presumed distinct innate African sexuality. However, according to Caldwell and co-workers' opponents, permissive sexual behaviors are much more behavioral than innate-oriented. As such, it is global youth culture that portrays premarital sex as “fun,” “normal” and “exciting,” especially since the emergence of mobile phones, that has facilitated youth's involvement in permissive sexual liaisons that might lead to HIV infection. Based on these arguments, and considering

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<sup>8</sup> Research on sexual/social connectivity by Weiss and Samenow (2010) highlights similar sexual networking characteristics through the use of smartphones. These devices provide opportunities for people who, for example, are in the food-court of a large urban mall to locate a woman or man who wants to have casual sex, even within miles (Weiss and Samenow 2010:242).

that mobile phone use is highly incorporated into local culture, public health practitioners may begin to consider the impact that mobile phones have on sexuality. Consequently, an anthropological approach to the study of sexually transmitted diseases turns indispensable.

#### ***1.1.4.2. Public health target to achieve Millennium Development Goals***

The commitment to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have posed key challenges to the public health practitioners of sub-Saharan Africa. Especially the goal to halt the further spread of HIV/AIDS and to achieve its universal treatment/eradication by 2015 seems hard to reach. Two years before the MDG deadline, epidemiological achievements have not proven that the pandemic will be controlled completely by 2015. The fact that new infections are reported every day proves that epidemiological and social science scrutiny into the behavioral factors propelling the rates of HIV infection are still insufficient. Changing culture, especially the pace of life including the acceleration of sexual activities, is neglected in what epidemiologist now call “the causal web,” that is the consideration of *all* patterns of disease transmission. Therefore, this study illuminates some of the behavioral factors responsible for continuous vulnerability to new infections that epidemiologists have paid little attention to. The study seeks to enhance our understanding of the intersection between disease and behavior in the era of the communication technology revolution.

#### ***1.1.4.3. Health impact on social connectivity and the search for more life chances***

In a BBC report dubbed “Is technology leaving you behind”<sup>9</sup> (BBC, 2005), a young Cameroonian made following comment:

“...Technology has really transformed lives here in Cameroon. When mobile phones first came here, I remember how fashionable it was to be in possession of one, or even to be related to anybody who had one. People even used them as a fashion accessory. Some hung them around their necks like dogs on a leash while others swung it ostentatiously from their hips. The ladies preferred to hold it as though showing the whole world. In as much as this has facilitated communication, it has its drawbacks. Some girls will do anything to have one, even if it is in exchange for sex...”

The excerpt above fits into the current status symbol ideology, that dictates that young people may do everything, including to have sex, to possess commodities that would enhance their

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<sup>9</sup> This report was a response to the World leaders’ summit held in Tunisia in 2005 where the digital divide was discussed, focusing on how technology is helping Africa.

status in the eyes of their peers. Similar to the supportive evidence from this popular media excerpt, previous research findings have associated the quest for status symbols among young people with the engagement in sexual relationships with elder people. Kuate-Defo (2004) found that it is the desire of Cameroonian youngsters to enhance their worth to peers, on top of the desire to meet their basic needs, that motivates them to engage in sexual relationships with sugar mummies or daddies. To increase one's worth to peers through the possession of expensive devices like mobile phones equals the desire for modernity. However, many young people in sub-Saharan Africa are not able buy these desired items by their own means because they face challenges of unemployment, high level corruption and poor economic prospects (Nyamnjoh 2002, Honwana and De Boeck 2005, Ndjio 2005). This situation often renders young people marginalized, disillusioned, alienated, vulnerable, and excluded.

However, technological gadgets like mobile phones and computers are at the core of young people's communicative interactions. Based on their distinctive identities, young people's adoption of technology, including use patterns, has social implications with a health dimension. Therefore, this study interfaces the status culture following the emergence of technology with health risks.

#### **1.1.5. Achieving social goals at the era of new communication technology in Cameroon**

In chapter 5, which is based on my field work in Yaoundé, I present qualitative evidence of social and sexual connectivity that is established through mobile phones to achieve three social goals. Arguing that risky sexual activities are driven by these social goals, I categorized participants' sexual behavior risk into four groups, (1) Low Risk Group (LRG) (less than 10 social contacts, no sexual partner); Medium Risk Group (MRG) (between 10 and 20 social contacts + less than 5 lifetime sexual partners); High Risk Group (HRG) (between 20 and 30 social contacts + between 5 and 10 lifetime sexual partners); and Very High Risk Group (VHRG) (more than 30 social contacts + more than 10 lifetime sexual partners).

I remind the reader that the three social goals are: to gain material support, to increase status in the eyes of peers and to increase longer-term life chances. At the same time, the coming of electronic technology in itself created new needs linked to these goals, for example, to possess a mobile phone, an iPod, an iPad or a laptop, as these commodities allow to pimp one's status. Ironically, many of these devices are within young people's reach only through

sexual encounters with elder partners from whom they receive these commodities on condition that sex will be exchanged.

This behavior of youngsters mingling with the elderly, is intrinsically linked to what social media channels (CNN, BBC, and CRTV) present as mobile and internet cultures<sup>10</sup>. In particular, a CNN program called “CNN Tech” presented the show *Cell phone culture: How cultural differences affect mobile use* (CNN Tech, 2012). According to this CNN program, every country defines in a different way how mobile phones should be used. For example, in some countries people are not allowed to make phone calls in buses, yet, they are allowed to send and receive text messages. Not only state policies, but also local norms define the ways mobile phones are perceived and used, as I found out during my comparative study in Ghent. Many young people in Ghent, including their parents (based on my informal interactions with them), do not approve of social networking between youths and elderly people. There are some exceptions though, as within families, intergenerational contacts are very normal and even an obligation, and in job-related circles too, social networking such as exchanging phone numbers turns out a necessity.

By contrast, in Yaoundé I found that local norms approve of the exchange of phone numbers between older and younger people, and the subsequent texting and calling. Local norms endorse these forms of social interactions, including the ensuing casual sexual relations, because life for young people in Yaoundé is fraught with difficulty to achieve goals. Firstly, they are eager to attain what Fokwang (2008) describes as “social adulthood” in his paper entitled *Youth Subjectivities and Associational Life in Bamenda, Cameroon* (2008). Fokwang mentions that the status of social adulthood relates to the dreams (or goals) youths consider as criteria to become successful adults, for example, to get married, to have children, to build a comfortable family home and to have a car. Many young university students, including those I interviewed and observed, are confronted with these goals. They start planning their lives as soon as they get their bachelor degrees. High school students do not think in the same way because they assume they still have plenty of time before they reach the university. However, the goals mentioned above are often difficult to achieve because of the limited opportunities provided by the Cameroonian government. As a consequence, many young people feel that connecting with powerful people while studying in universities – especially with those who have a top position (in the government) – is a social strategy to secure their chances to achieve such goals as getting a job. In the next

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<sup>10</sup> CNN is Cable News Network (an American based international TV channel), BBC stands for British Broadcasting Corporation and CRTV for Cameroon Radio and Television.

paragraph, I outline how Fokwang (2008) explores these goals and outlines the social traps they entail.

According to Fokwang (2008), social and political problems, such as limited employment opportunities, confine young Cameroonians to “slowly ascend” to social adulthood. Consequently, young people perceive social connectedness as an alternative to speed up this process. Research by Tchatoka and Yogo (2011) has shown that social networks are crucial to young people who hope to leave unemployment behind. Today’s technologies present new ways of constructing and maintaining these networks. However, access to such networks may be achieved only “through social exchange and dependency” (Klein, Hattori and DeRose 2008:309). The authors state that girls who ask for a job are understood to be suggesting a sexual arrangement, and that from the acceptance of the job ensues the acceptance of the sexual advances.

Young Cameroonian people’s social connectivity nowadays differs from what it used to be in the early days since, according to Srivastava (2005), mobile phones are pervasive in their daily lives and they have moved from mere technological objects to key social objects. On top of that, social connectivity used to involve social interactions with one’s extended family exclusively, and it aimed at supporting kin (Nsamenang 1987), whereas today, citizens turn to the organized welfare system instead. Also, many Cameroonians live in cities (Ntui 2006:115) characterized by the ubiquity of new communication technologies and thus traditional behavior previously witnessed in villages has been revolutionized in the urban setting. Bettencourt and co-workers (2006) confirm this ubiquity by mentioning that with the emergence of these technologies, cities are now both “society’s predominant engine of innovation” (Bettencourt et al. 2006:7301) and the source of many social problems, including sexual risk behaviors. A mobile phone enables to communicate data which differ from the orally transmitted data transmitted by the previous generations. Through text messages, members of a current network can give an immediate report of the actual situation they are living at the moment, whereas the orally transmitted data are limited to ex post facto reconstructions. In other words, text messages allow to communicate shared behavior, that is on who is doing what, where and with whom, and to create gatherings on the spot.

In developed countries, anthropologists, psychologists, epidemiologists and computational scientists working together in health centers, use mobile phone data and data collected on the internet to model and predict human behavior (Kershaw et al. 2010, Whittaker 2012). Anderson (2004) identified the importance of examining telephone call patterns and sexual initiation among adolescents in the south of the USA. Focusing on

seduction, coercion and force as sexual initiation tactics, Anderson found that “major cultural events and shifts in cultural norms” influence women’s calling patterns and how they fall in love with men.

The illustrations above are significant for my own research on the use mobile phones among young people in Yaoundé. In addition, a few researchers, such as Mokake (2009), Nyamnjoh (2009) and Frei (2013), have documented useful information concerning mobile phones and its impact on young people’s sexual behavior in the entire Cameroon. In particular, Mokake (2009:2) has documented the impact of mobile phones on teenage girls in the city of Molyko and points out that “cellular phones represent among other things a technology of contradiction, connectivity, identity, safety, status and above all a gadget to idealize autonomy.”

#### **1.1.6. Description of Yaoundé and its opportunities for young people**

The Germans were the first to colonize Cameroon when in 1884, doctor Nachtigal hoisted the German flag in Limbe, in the Southwestern region of Cameroon. From Limbe (which was called Bimbia during the German occupation and afterwards Victoria during the English occupation), German rule gradually expanded across the country, including Yaoundé, Cameroon’s current capital. The etymology of the word Yaoundé is *ya Ewondo* meaning “people of Ewondo,” or “Jaunde” in German rendition (Tsoungui 2010:114).<sup>11</sup> Yaoundé is also known as “*la ville des sept collines*” or “the town of seven hills.” A hill in Beti language is called “*nkol*,” and the hills in Yaoundé bear the following names: *Nkol'bisson*, *Nkol'eton*, *Nkol'ndongo*, *Nkol'febe*, *Nkol'afamba*, *Nkol'dom* and *Nkol'messa*. After the Germans were defeated during WW1, Cameroon was taken over by both the French and the British, until its independence in 1960.

Yaoundé only became the capital in 1960 when South Cameroon, which had been under British rule, reunified with East Cameroon Yaoundé, formerly occupied by the French. The city has a population of about 2.5 million and is located between longitude 3° 52' 0" N and latitude 11° 31' 0" E<sup>12</sup>. The city *appears* to be a nerve center that offers plenty of opportunities to young people – including the opportunities created by new communication technology – to (1) get basic needs met while studying at the university, (2) get things needed

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<sup>11</sup> Ewondo is one of the three languages of the Fang-Beti ethnic groups. The other two are Eton and Bulu. While the Ewondo and the Eton claim to be the autochthonous group of Yaoundé city itself, the Bulu (incumbent president Paul Biya’s sub ethnic group) are autochthonous of the Southern region (Ebolowa).

<sup>12</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yaound%C3%A9>.

to advance and maintain self-status and (3) increase longer-term life chances. Historically, Yaoundé has indeed been a hub for young people to build and improve academic careers meant to qualify them for job opportunities and to ensure other longer-term life chances. These academic opportunities stem from the two state universities, and from the many professional schools and high schools, including those at which I interviewed participants for this study<sup>13</sup>. As seen however, a degree is no guarantee to get a job, and many graduates remain unemployed.

Besides educational opportunities, Yaoundé provides many other attractions, such as nightclubs where young people create the social contacts they think could help achieve their social goals. In the data results chapter (chapter 5), I present for instance some of the observations I made during fieldwork in the Djeuga and Katios nightclubs of downtown Yaoundé. Through informal interactions at these sites, I learned more about young people's social networking as means to gain basic needs.

Next, through participant observation in bars around the city, especially in the Bonas neighborhood, I discovered that young people flood into Yaoundé to make use of the cheap internet access to create profitable contacts. These include transnational contacts, especially European ones, as it is often in Europe that youngsters desire to “fall bush” or emigrate to a Western country. This expression was initially documented by Fleischer (2006:17) in her study about the role kinship plays during the emigration process to Europe. “Bush falling,” Fleischer writes, is the act of leaving the country for the West, where life is believed to be better (see also Ndjio Basile et al. 2008). Many young people who cannot find a job in Cameroon, a condition that implies limited chances to achieve social adulthood, as mentioned by Fokwang (2008), shift to bush falling as a valuable alternative. However, bush falling in itself involves a lot of money (flight ticket, visa fee and such) and, in case the family cannot support it as Fleischer (2006) stated, family members usually contribute huge sums of money. However, many young people have to turn to other means, one of which is to intentionally entice an older person into sexual contact until the capital needed to leave the country is obtained. Once the future emigrant has figured out the country of destination through the

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<sup>13</sup> *Lycée Leclerc, Lycée d'Emana, Lycée d'Anguissa, Lycée Nkolndongo, Lycée Nkoleton, Lycée Essos, Lycée Etoudi, Lycée Bilingue d'Etoug-Ebe, Lycée Nkonkana* plus the four high schools selected as research sites for this study. The professional schools are the National higher institute for military officers or *École militaire inter-armes* (EMIA), National school of civil engineers *Polytechnique*, International relations institute of Cameroon (IRIC), Advanced school of mass communication (ASMAC), International institute of youths and sports, African regional center for labour administration or *Centre régionale Africain d'Administration du Travail* (CRADAT), National college of police officers, National school of administration and magistracy or *École Nationale d'Administration et Magistrature* (ENAM).



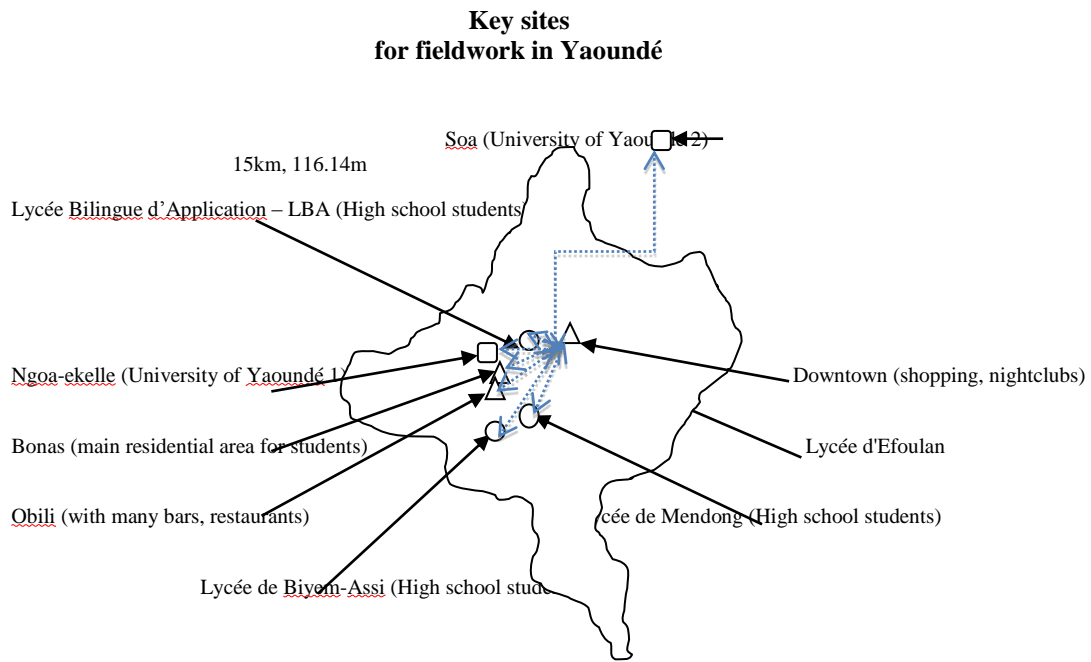
internet, he/she will hang out in places (such as bars) profitable for socializing, in order to exchange phone numbers with a *mboma* (sugar daddy or mummy). As such, frequent visits to cyber cafés are strongly attached to young people's imagination of a good life, a component of longer-term life chances.

Yaoundé also provides opportunities in its urban peripheries where socially-dominated corners are situated, which city residents call the “*carrefours de la joie*” (Ndjio, 2005) or cross-roads of enjoyment. These cross-roads of enjoyment comprise bars with loud music, hair-cutting salons, soya and roasted fish spots and other cheap restaurants, spread along the streets of Yaoundé (and of Douala as well, as it appears). Additionally, there are many shopping centers in downtown Yaoundé, such as the *Marché central* at *avenue Kennedy*. These places are suggestive of the urban trendy and spatial flamboyance where young people socialize for pleasure. Communication patterns within these places offer insight into sexual risk practices foreshadowing the social dimension of disease spread.

Finally, Yaoundé is a place which attracts promising young soccer players from around the country. Football is the most celebrated sport in Cameroon (Vidacs, 2007:102). Oral as well as written sources claim that “the initial soccer teams in Cameroon evolved in Douala and Yaoundé...., and these two towns remained the centers of the sport” (Ibid:104) <sup>14</sup> In order to succeed in playing in the Cameroonian national team, one needs to create a complicated web of contacts with former coaches, referees, and even with the sports ministers. Promising young footballers move to Yaoundé in order to publicize themselves through such connections with complicated alliances. An easy way to connect to such people, is precisely through mediated technology as mobile phones or emails.

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<sup>14</sup> The initial teams are Yaoundé Tonnerre Kalara club, Union Douala and Canon Yaoundé.



**Figure 2: Map of Yaoundé indicating research sites**

Source: Fieldwork notes 2010

### **1.1.7. My interest in the study of HIV/AIDS and sexual risk behaviors**

What interests me in studying HIV risk behaviors triggered by social media, is to examine how this new communication technology has altered traditional ways of communication, and the role it plays in sexual flirtation and the venues through which sexual risk behavior occurs. From this perspective, I examine how the social structure and life-worlds of young people have been altered due to the ubiquity of mobile phones. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used, and the outcomes may be considered for HIV/AIDS prevention programs that promulgate behavior change. An example of behavior change would be for young people to use the opportunities created by new communication technology to engage in one intimate sexual relationship instead of using them to engage in multi-sexual relationships. Nonetheless, we cannot lose sight of the predicament of young people which blocks them from achieving the three social goals, up- scaling self-status to peers (having the latest brand of mobile phone in itself is a social criterion), increasing means to gain material support and increasing longer-term life chances.

Arguably, a lot of young Cameroonians have faced this predicament, yet some decided to maintain a steady (committed) sexual relationship instead of creating several

avenues using techno-social devices to have the things they do not have. As it appears, the Mobile Telephone Network (MTN), one of the Cameroonian mobile phone service companies, was aware that young people use mobile phones to engage in several sexual relations because they have limited resources for buying credits to call their regular (intimate) partners, which in turn pushes them to rely on sugar daddies or mummies to get access to the airtime credits to call their steady partners. It may be hard to imagine (except for Africanist researchers) that such gifts as airtime credits by *mbomas* today create “unnoticed” and “neglected” channels of high risk behaviors, but in Cameroon, it is a reality. Winkelman (2009:72) describes these practices as “secretive” or “hidden” precisely because there is little academic research on this topic. In Cameroon, both the government and the private sector are expected to join stakes in the fight against HIV. Most companies in the private sectors contribute to the fight through what they call “social promotion.” For example, the MTN created a social promotion program to help reduce the permissive sexual activities which are believed to be facilitated by mobile phone use. This social promotion program allows young people to receive one hour airtime credit for free, which they can use to call their intimate sexual partners. Indeed, clients give one so-called favorite number, which for most young people is the number of their intimate sexual partner, to the MTN customer service. The free airtime is therefore indexed, for each customer, to call only the favorite phone number given. Through this form of social marketing (offering free airtime credit), MTN contributes in encouraging intimate sexual partner practices among its subscribers, especially among the most sexually active population (young people).

Inspired by the above arguments, including the supportive awareness of MTN on the role mobile phones may play in HIV transmission, I have focused on how mobile phones and the internet might increase risk behaviors, from having several sexual partners at a time to making a living by transactional sex. Furthermore, I have a keen interest in the cultural perspective. In popular media, journalists talk about mobile phones being a new kind of gift, especially since women are eager to possess the latest brand. In a FES’s report entitled *Dialogue and globalization*, a Cameroonian journalist stated the following:

“.....The mobile telephone, once a luxury for a few privileged people, is now accessible to many who offer it as a token to their loved ones. Or, they buy them airtime cards. Nowadays, some girls will only date boys or men who can offer them a

mobile telephone. "I cannot date a guy who can't buy me a mobile phone," says Annie, a student at *Lycée de Jos* in Douala....” (FES, 2005).<sup>15</sup>

Besides online news, popular musicians too parody the impact of social media on local culture. For example, Eriko released a famous song in Douala about young people moving from rural areas to cities like Douala and Yaoundé to surf the internet. The song goes like this:

**“...Je plante de l’igname au village,  
mais ça ne donne pas,  
je plante de la tomate,  
mais ça ne donne pas,  
donc je vais à Douala pour surfer l’internet.**

***Comme ça je vais trouver un blanc...”***

Translation:

“...I plant yams in the village,  
but they do not yield,  
I plant tomatoes,  
but they do not yield  
so I go to Douala to surf the internet  
And get myself a white guy...”

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<sup>15</sup> Federick Ebert Stiftung or Federick Ebert foundation is a German based organization that promotes North-South dialogue on the processes of globalization. It has many branches in Africa, including in Yaoundé.

The song's message implies that young people in rural areas are faced with limited chances. They try to plant crops (yams and tomatoes), but it does not bring in enough resources to accomplish their longer-term life goals. Consequently, pushed by the emergence of communication technologies, they move to Douala (city) to increase their life chances. The internet connection allows them to seek transnational marriages and subsequently leave Cameroon. As will be repeated in the literature review of the following sections, Bettina Frei (2010) carried out research in the Cameroonian city of Bamenda on young people's notion of "a good life" in a "far away land," a dream that could only come true through the internet.

#### **1.1.8. Sources of motivations for further research**

In this study, I divide sources of motivations into two, that is theoretical on the one hand, and personal and applied on the other.

Firstly, theoretical motives originate, in part, from anthropologist Thornton's (2008) conceptual framework on sexual networks which he used to analyze his fieldwork data of both Uganda and Kenya. Thornton's model, which he frames as an "unimagined community," goes beyond previous epidemiological approaches examining HIV transmission, by arguing that the social relations that we create each day, in themselves develop into large scale sexual networks that are complex and unimagined. In addition, Thornton proposes an HIV prevention strategy through kinship networks as it was used in rural Uganda to control sexual behaviors. This prevention method comprised traditional sanctions, for example, family members diagnosed of HIV/AIDS would automatically lose heritable property from his/her kinsmen because the disease had brought shame to the family. After reading Thornton's (2008) ideas, I was particularly motivated by his "unimagined" concept, and put forward that the mobile phone accelerates sexual flirtation in hidden ways which are still unimagined.

From Thornton's model, I identified the three social goals that are recurrent in this study, and which are (1) to gain material support, (2) to achieve longer-term life chances and (3) to increase self-status. These three goals motivate young people to create social contacts which later on lead to sexual activities with people they may previously have been unconnected to, for instance *mbomas*. Furthermore, Thornton's anthropological cross-cultural approach to Uganda and Kenya motivated me to include a cross-cultural study in my research design as well, that is a comparison between Ghent and Yaoundé.

Secondly, my motivation is personal and applied. I was still very young when in the late 1980s, the rumors about the emergence of the HIV pandemic started to circulate in Cameroon. Between the 1980s and the 1990s, reports of deaths caused by HIV infection were often perceived as a myth, and people would commonly attribute the cause of death to witchcraft. Indeed, in chapter 5, I will mention how, while growing up in my village, I heard people talking about the “American Idea to Discourage Sex” (AIDS)<sup>16</sup>. When an elderly person died, his or her death was considered natural because of the advanced age, but for young people, their families often allocated the cause to something other than biology. Usually one particular person would be accused of using witchcraft to kill the young person who had just passed away. From 1990 onwards however, people started to take notice of the much increased mortality among young people, both in the rural and in the urban areas, and this aroused confusion. All of a sudden such an huge amount of youngster was dying, and this called for alternative explanations.

#### **1.1.9. Young people and community networks**

In this section, I intend to identify where we can allocate blame for the cause of young people’s death in communities such as those in Yaoundé. I argue that the death of many young people occurs because mobile phone usage now permeates their everyday life. Yet, community members, by still attributing most deaths, including AIDS-related ones, to supernatural processes, rather challenge our thinking about how young people get involved in risky sexual behaviors that expose them to HIV infection. The participants of this study, high school and university students, are part of the Cameroonian “educated class” and of communities where mobile phone usage has become part of mainstream culture. Their education is considered a social investment, that is, a source of pride to the local community which they come from. Indeed, those studying at universities are seen as future ministers, parliamentarians or directors who will return after graduation to develop their community of origin. Once they succeed to occupy key posts in the government, community members assume that the deteriorated roads, markets and town halls will be rehabilitated, and that their need for water on a permanent basis will be settled. Therefore, many communities feel that having young people attending higher education is a subject of prestige and progress, as these students create promising perspectives. These students in turn spend their lives in Yaoundé struggling to achieve their community’s goals because of family and community bonds.

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<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire), AIDS in French is called "SIDA" and Congolese refer to it as "*Syndrome Imaginaire pour Décourager les Amoureux*" (SIDA).

Therefore, not only kinship and family members contribute, morally and materially, to the success of a particular student, but the entire community does. This explains why the success or the failure of a student, which is rapidly spread through rumor, may become the preoccupation of an entire community. Community members might consider the student's death as a loss of community prowess. They do not only try to find out the cause of death (which they often consider to be due to one malignant individual who envies the forthcoming progress) but also seek to revenge this death because they see it as an obstacle to the progress of the community as a whole. In the same way, students who die from AIDS are subject to community's rumor as well. If such a young student dies, the community immediately starts thinking his/her death is caused by jealousy-driven witchcraft. As such, it is crucial to connect young people's use of mobile phones and the ensuing sexual risk behaviors to their relationship with the entire community.

In brief, since communities look upon such young people for society prowess, the death of a student due to AIDS may be interpreted as a result of jealousy among certain community members, rather than to the sexual risk behavior that had presumably exposed the deceased to HIV infection in the first place. The question, therefore, is: do community members accept the biological processes that lead the body to be defeated by sexually transmitted diseases? Or is death all about witchcraft, a successful young person dying because someone else's jealousy?

The above relates to Nwarbébé and co-workers' (2010) findings concerning the misconceptions about HIV by some Cameroonians. These researchers put forward that many Cameroonians still not believe in the existence of HIV/AIDS and thus consider this pandemic as "a spell [which can be] treated only by faith or by traditional healers" (Nwarbébé and co-workers 2010:29). However, the use of mobile phone inspired Yaoundé's youth to novel pathways to approach their sexuality, which might lead to unsafe sex and hence to disease and death. But if the community denies the biological process of death and looks for the death's cause in witchcraft instead, to make these communities reflect upon the impact mobile phone use has on sexuality, might become a long-winded task.

## **1.2. Literature review of research based in Yaoundé**

HIV/AIDS prevalence persists in Cameroon, and epidemiological attention to its causes, its patterns of transmission and to the ensuing intervention have been split into three major

factors, socio-cultural, economic and political. In this section, I present a review of existing knowledge on HIV/AIDS in Cameroon that relates mobile phone use to risky sexual behavior. In order to introduce my study in light of the larger arguments about changing culture due to the appropriation of mobile phone use, I employ relevant studies on other socio-cultural factors that affect the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

Firstly, socio-cultural researchers like Awuba and Macassa (2007) have stated that Cameroonians engage in risky sexual behavior due in part to the gendered ideologies that structure the economy and to their associated norms which limit women's access to material resources. Traditionally, men assumed dominant roles and this was widely accepted in Cameroonian society. Consequently, access to the mainstream labor market was only open to men, and women were to be their dependents. According to Awuba and Macassa (2007), most women who succeed in getting a job, are nurses or teachers, roles that are considered as extensions of their caring nature. To gain access to material resources, unemployed women have to either depend on their male head of the household, engage in informal trade or take up prostitution, three situation in which women do not gain/earn a lot of money. The obstructed access to economic means keeps women powerless in their relation to men, which in turn makes it hard for them to negotiate matters such as safe sex practices. As for this study, female participants reported that their sugar daddies often had the ability to make the ultimate decision about condom use, and that they usually remained powerless during these negotiations. Rwenge (2000) and Awuba and Macassa (2007) emphasize this as a unique socio-cultural factor, notably age mixing responsible for sexually transmitted infection (STI). But apart from the age component, such relationships highlight gender differentials too. Young girls engage in relationships with older men because of the financial support it yields, which allows them to maintain the expensive life style they cannot afford by their own means, since they receive only a limited pocket allowance. The existing literature on the gendered power dynamics in negotiating the terms of sexual encounters, sheds an important light on the vulnerability of Cameroonian girls and women who engage in commercial sex. However, it also applies to young girls' ties – mostly initiated through mobile phone use – with sugar daddies, which are well-acknowledged cross-generational sexual relationships that often involve unequal power for safer sex communication. The sugar daddy has the power to dominate his girl, as *he* can offer what *she* needs.



In addition, I consulted literature about the socio-cultural factors for HIV transmission among youths in an urban context in relation to the ubiquity of mobile phone use as an extension of cultural practices. For example, Meekers and Klein's (2003) study of patterns of high risk, specifically multi-sexual relationships among urban youth in Douala and Yaoundé, broadens our understanding of the adoption of mobile phone use and its implications for young people's reproductive health. As the authors see it, the adoption of mobile phones affects traditional courtships and social relations in urban settings. For example, romantic text messages replace verbal expressions and phone calls, and reduce face-to-face inhibitions while convincing a sexual partner. Mobile phones have only gained popularity in Cameroon since about 2003. Frei (2012) suggests that before 2000, mediated communication in social networking was rare in urban contexts. By inference, more sexual activities must have taken place in the recent decade (2003 till 2013) as compared to the period when mobile phones and the internet were still gaining attention.

Another socio-cultural factor that has attracted the attention of social scientists studying high HIV prevalence in Cameroon, are the local practices meant to avoid pregnancy. According to Kaptue et al. (1993), young girls use condoms because they want to avoid pregnancy, not to deliberately try and avoid sexually transmitted diseases as HIV. The existing literature on pregnancy avoidance broadens our understanding of the vulnerability among girls and women who are sexually active, including those who engage in commercial sex.

During the focus group discussions at high schools in Yaoundé, the participants reported that if they used condoms with the casual partners they had contacted through mobile phones for material reasons, they did so exclusively because they wanted to avoid pregnancies, not to avoid STDs. On top of that, if the frequency of meeting a very same "uncommitted" partner increases, condom use becomes less likely, as the informants mentioned that with their regular boyfriends (with whom intimacy often begins through networks at school) they would not use condoms but rather rely on their menstrual cycles to avoid pregnancy. As a result, the will to avoid pregnancy is protective against STDs exclusively for those girls who consistently use condoms instead of relying on their menstrual cycles. These girls turn out to be rather the girls that have more non-steady partners, and even girls with little knowledge of HIV infection would still be protected against STDs and HIV/AIDS. The same paradox applies to boys whose knowledge relies upon kinship and

extended family obligation: most boys will use condoms simply because they want to avoid to have to drop out after they impregnated a girl, since he will have to leave school to take up his responsibilities (either take care of the girl at his home, or pay compensation for the pregnancy, in both cases, the parents will not cough up the finances, but the boy will have to). In brief, safe sex practices turn out to be extremely inconsistent.

Analyzing how gender ideologies affect the rates of condom use, a cross-cultural study by Buvé et al. (2001) found that there was an important relation between the level of women's dependency on men and the rate of condom use. For their study, Buvé et al. (2001) conducted surveys in four African cities where HIV/STDs were prevalent, Kisumu (Kenya), Cotonou (Benin), Ndola (Zambia), and Yaoundé (Cameroon). Among the four communities studied, those with a high level of women's economic dependency on men, Cotonou and Yaoundé, had also lower rates of condom use in non-marital relationships. Buvé and his co-workers conclude that gender inequality creates materially-oriented risk attitudes, especially gifting practices between younger females and older males. These social and economic hierarchies lead to a decrease in the capacity of women to practice agency during sexual communication. Their study is inspiring for mine in different ways. Firstly, it is a comparative study of sexual behaviors in the same way my study examines distinct sexual attitudes between young people in Ghent and those in Yaoundé. Secondly, the findings by Buvé and his co-workers on material inequalities and women's dependency on men are relevant because they might support my hypothesis that young people's limited access to resources to achieve their social goals (self-status, material support and longer-term life chances) pushes them to alternative sexual encounters. Indeed, these inequalities limit young people to achieve their social goals, and as such encourage techno-social networking leading to sex with elder people as a valuable alternative.

Peer influence – which is generally considered a factor in adolescent behavior – is part of the social norms among young people. Vanrossem and Meekers (2011) have studied peer influence as a socio-cultural variable and explored how in Cameroon it affects behaviors risky for sexually transmitted diseases. In particular, they ran a survey on social control in relation to friendship ties and proved that dependence on peers for social approval has a negative impact on the behavior of young people. Moreover, Vanrossem and Klein's study confirms previous studies beyond Cameroon on the impact of peers in deviant behavior (Rodgers and Rowe 1990, Trembley et al. 2005). Peer influence turned out to be a factor in

the Belgian context of research too. During fieldwork in Ghent, participants reported peer pressure on their drinking and smoking habits, feeling obliged to participate in drinking parties in order to conform to the group identity.

Scholars as Sidze and Kuate (2013) have conducted perspective studies of the association between the parent-child relationship and social control on risk behaviors for HIV/AIDS transmission/prevention. Their study reports high levels of parental monitoring, moderate quality of parent-child relationships and low levels of parent-child communication on sexual matters. While Sidze and Kuate highlight the connection between children and parents, one element of Mokake's (2009) study on the social behavior of teenage girls reveals that they use mobile phones to escape parental control. In recent years, internet and text messages have raised questions about the role of parents in controlling their children. Both studies lay a foundation for future research and my study expands the scope of their analysis and looks at the ways young people by-pass parental surveillance using modern communication technology.

Social science researchers also revealed the importance of disclosing HIV status as a social factor that could avoid putting sexual partners at risk. In Cameroon, researchers have been paying attention to social variables, especially the avoidance of stigma to disclose ones HIV sero-status. Loubiere et al. (2009) emphasize that if people do not stigmatize those infected by HIV, this might encourage their voluntary disclosure of a sero-positive status. Disclosing HIV sero-status to partners, as Loubiere and co-workers suggest, could have an impact on the ties among all partners of the same sex networks. For example, in a network of students, the diagnosis and the disclosure of a partner's HIV status will reduce the incidence rate of new infections. Still from the social perspective, Konyuy et al. (2009) present a similar approach to safer sex contact, using a sample of 2130 people in Cameroon, of whom 214 were diagnosed with HIV. Konyuy and his team focused on assessing the acceptability of the HIV test in determining the prevalence of HIV among prenatal mothers with an unknown HIV status. Even though the acceptability of prenatal HIV testing was negatively associated with maternal age parity and with a number of antenatal visits, it was positively associated with the level of education. The study mainly illustrates patterns of HIV screening as means of reducing mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Both Loubiere and co-workers and Konyuy and co-workers' surveys contributed to lay the foundation of this study.

The final socio-cultural source's concerns are exactly those of this study, mobile phone use and its social impact on sexual behavior in Cameroon. Even though his study is not sex-related, the Cameroonian researcher who initially documented research on mobile phone in Cameroon is Walter Nkwi. In his two initial works on mobile telephony use (Nkwi 2008, 2009), Nkwi presents a significant introduction to the changing landscape of the telephone industry in Cameroon. Both works explore the emergence of mobile phones since 1995, by giving accounts on their popularity over landline phones.

Besides Nkwi, scholars as Mokake (2009), Nyamnjoh (2009) and Frei (2013) – that I already discussed above – have enhanced the scholarship on the knowledge about the relationship between mobile phones and sexual activity in Cameroon. In the same way, Brinkman and De Bruijn (2014) highlight how the use of new communication technologies, especially mobile phone, helps to connect young Cameroonians in the diaspora with their home country. To begin with, Nyamnjoh's book chapter entitled *Married But Available* in *The New talking drums in Africa* (Nyamnjoh, De Bruin and Brinkman, 2009) reflects upon current sexual behavior as a result of mobile phones. The setting is Mimboland, a fictional name for the author's home country, Cameroon. Indeed, in Nyamnjoh's novel equally entitled *Married But Available*, the author uses fictional characters, Lilly Loveless and Britney, who are carrying out fieldwork in Puttkamerstown, which is another of the author's fictional names for Yaoundé. The two researchers are considered as outsiders who conduct anthropological research on mobile phone use in Mimboland (Cameroon). The author's use of the stranger's perspective is meant to make a "subtle exploration of the process of data collection in the social sciences," especially about sensitive issues such as sexuality. Indeed, in the novel, a stranger enters a shop and inquires about the number of people who use mobile phones in Puttkamerstown. The shop assistant replies by saying: "no idea about the number of people who use mobile phones," and then adds "but I do know that most of the women who own phones, got them from men," as such signaling the relation between gift and sexuality. Secondly, there is Mokake's (2009) account of the impact mobile phone has on teen girls in Buea, Cameroon, not a fictional account this time, but an academic one. The author studied teen girls from the Molyko neighborhood, at the periphery of the University of Buea, a student site where mobile phones have a profound impact on social life. He shows that these girls text each other whenever a sugar daddy arrives in town. As such, the author confirms that connectivity through mobile phones thus has far-reaching consequences for Molyko's teen girls.

Apart from the above three studies on mobile phones and sexual behaviors, other Cameroonian researchers have documented simply how Cameroonians adopt mobile phones. Gwanmesia (2010) outlines how and why people of a diverse group of Buea society make use of their mobile phones. She shows that the appropriation of a mobile phone relates to the social, economic and political life of its users. In the same way, Wanji (2009) presents the use of mobile phone from a sociolinguistic perspective. His study, in a comparative way, shows how mobile phone users in Cameroon and Nigeria display their cultural specificities using text messages. Wanji's aim is to show how texters from both countries have succeeded in reinventing conventional linguistic forms to communicate (Wanji 2009:28). Texting is a property of connectivity, and brings out cultural specificities. My study also explores how communication technologies in itself are a form of changing culture.

Finally, the studies I present in the following paragraphs, all incorporate an economic perspective on mobile phone use. Rwenge (2003) explores how wealthy Cameroonian men take advantage of the economic difficulties of young girls to fully satisfy their sexual desires. The author focusses on poor young girls in Bamenda, the capital city of the Northwestern region, who are being exploited by wealthy men who collect their phone numbers for the purpose of sexual intercourse. Even though I do not focus on whether my sample population is poor, yet, I align with Rwenge on the relationship between university and high school students with their *mbomas* (either sugar daddies or mummies), especially on the role of mobile phones in connecting them. Furthermore, one of my interests is how young people use mobile phones as a technological gadget to connect with elderly men or women who offer them modest gifts. It partakes of the construction of youth identities, namely the dimension of technology in contemporary youth culture.

Mbassa et al. (2009), still from the economic perspective, also investigate young Cameroonian people's reasons to use mobile phones to establish sexual relations. More precisely, Mbassa and his co-authors (2009) focus on the vulnerability of the exploited minor girls, showing how young girls' entry into prostitution is poverty-driven, as in their study, relationships with *mbomas* are phrased as "prostitution." Next, these young girls use their received mobile phone in turn to communicate with the sexual partners who offered them the phone in the first place. The gift-giver had precisely this thought in minds, that to enable to contact his or her sexual partner whenever the he or she feels the need to do so. Mbassa and his co-workers use the example of school fees which, if paid by wealthy men, lead to a

situation where a young girl – in return – can hardly refuse sexual intercourse. Similarly, as I will explore in this study, the gifts that young girls receive from elderly men symbolize social bonds which involve the obligation to exchange sex. This obligation might lead to unsafe sex practices, especially if it concerns coercive partners.

Socio-cultural practices that hinder protective sex and aggravate HIV/AIDS prevalence can be linked to sexual flirtation through mobile phones between young people and their sexual partners. For example, Meekers and Klein (2001) embarked on a study to increase adolescent self-efficacy in convincing sexual partners to use condoms. To accomplish this goal, they conducted a survey on beliefs about the use of condoms among unmarried young people in Cameroon. The results of their survey proved that unmarried young people might have tried to use condoms once in a while, but that this use was inconsistent. In the same way, in my study appears evidence of the knowledge that condom use prevents HIV infection, yet unwillingness to communicate about condoms, especially by those participants who reported having many sexual partners. Even though I did not ask whether they use condoms or not, I did investigate participants' secondary practices concerning condoms, by asking for instance if they like talking, including advising, peers about condom use. I concluded that participants who reported having many social contacts and those who answered having more than ten sexual life partners, did not like to talk about condoms, and were also less likely to use them.

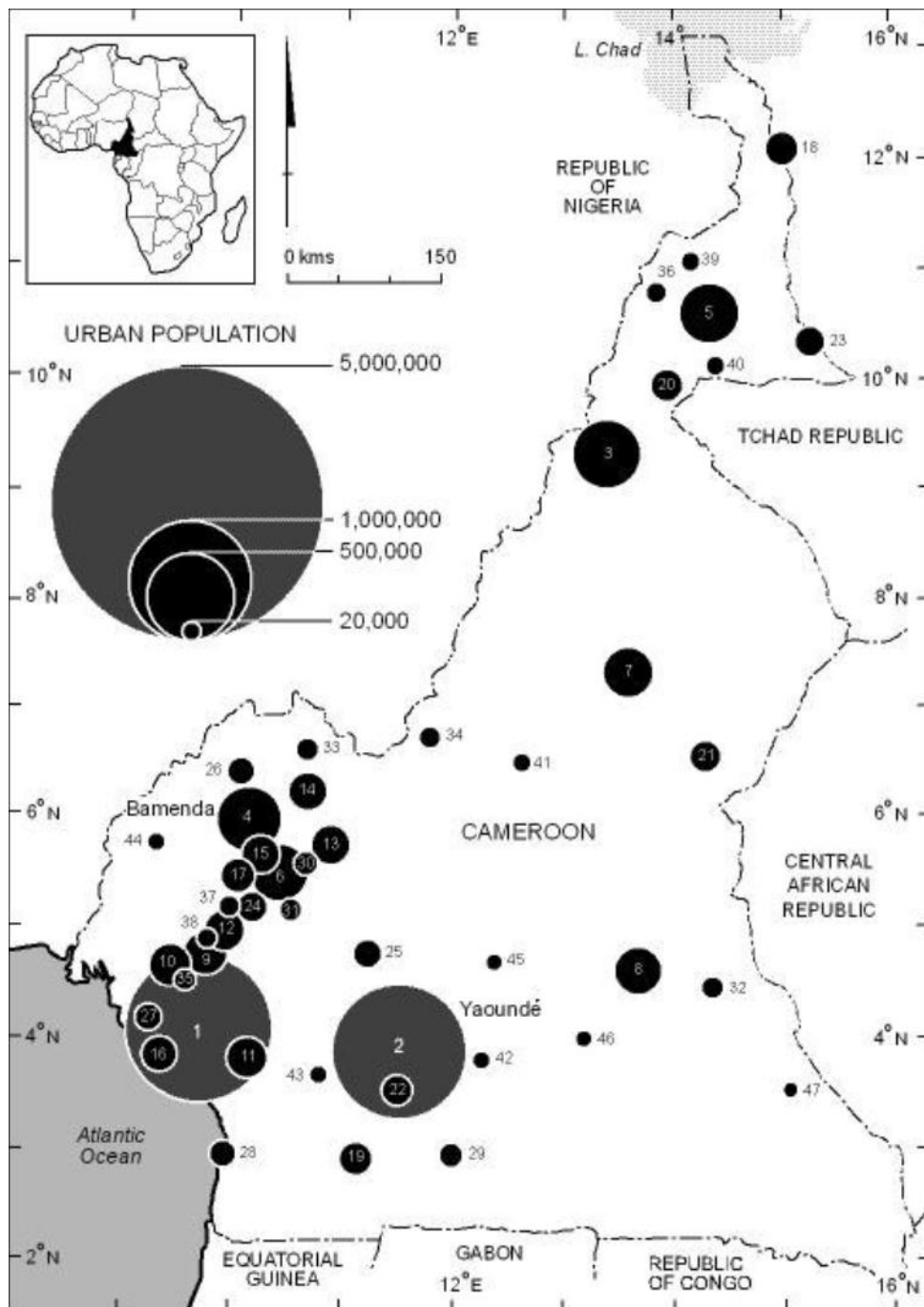


Figure 3: Map of Cameroon showing the position of Yaoundé

Source: DSCN (2000)





## Chapter 2. Research methodology

In this chapter, I present the methods employed during this study's research. I start with the sampling design, then reveal my hypothesis and continue with the procedures that I used in order to collect relevant data. These procedures incorporate literature research (books, periodicals, journals and such) and ethnographical methods (fieldwork). The latter included questionnaires, focus group discussions, participant observation and face-to-face interviews, and were used at the key sites for data collection. These sites are the following four high schools: *Lycée de Mendong*, *Lycée de Biyem-Assi*, *Lycée d'Efoulan* and *Lycée Bilingue d'Application* (LBA) and the following two universities: Yaoundé 1 and Yaoundé 2 universities. Note that Yaoundé 1 University has two campuses, one is located at the main campus site and the other one is located at the ENS campus site. The results of both campuses are taken together and considered as the results of Yaoundé 1 University. As for my fieldwork in Belgium, it was effectuated at Ghent University.

In this paragraph, I will briefly explain why I chose the research sites mentioned above. Firstly, the reasons for selecting these sites are practical, as I thought the sites were simply more appropriate for sampling purposes. Indeed, the locations of these schools fall within the part of Yaoundé that, to the best of my knowledge, is dominantly inhabited by youths and being a youth (with focus on age) was my first sampling criteria (see sampling details below). Secondly, I considered the proximity between the research sites as a relevant factor to achieve the time plan for this study as time itself, I suppose, is a crucial element to round up research projects successfully. Consequently, shorter distances between the research sites contributed to the success of smooth data collection as we had initially contemplated. For example, moving from Yaoundé 1 University to LBA within just a few minutes saved us a considerable amount of time and contributed to cost minimization (walking instead of taking a taxi). Thirdly, I specifically included Yaoundé 1 University as it had been my alma mater, and I thought this might provide the advantage of familiarity with which I, as a researcher, would approach those being studied. Also to my advantage was the fact that I am familiar with the vernacular (lingua franca, that is, *camfranglais* that I will explain in a subsequent section of this chapter, see also Kouega Paul 2003). My knowledge of *camfranglais*

consequently gave me the opportunity to understand youth culture in Yaoundé more easily than any outsider. The questionnaires distributed at Ghent University, were written in English.

I want to highlight that during fieldwork in the three high schools in Yaoundé, we only concentrated on lower sixth (LS) and upper sixth (US) grades or classes<sup>17</sup>. I will first explain what I mean by lower and upper sixth grades (LS and US). In the Cameroonian educational system, high school studies are a two-year program and this period is particularly considered as a transition to university studies. The first year in high school is known as lower sixth grade while the final is called upper sixth grade. Students in upper sixth grade often refer to themselves as pre-university students and thus to be sure to enroll in the university just one year after they passed the upper sixth grade. Yet, enrolment to start university studies the following year often depends on their success at the GCE or *Baccalauréat* exams, results they will only know by the end of the upper sixth grade<sup>18</sup>.

We made sure that in each of the three high schools, one focus group discussion for lower sixth and another for upper sixth were arranged. Additionally, since we thought that staff members (teachers) often have specific knowledge concerning the impact of mobile phones on youth culture, we had brief meetings with them as specialized informants (being adults and educators). I also wish to remark in this section that, even though my intention is to present only the procedures of data collection, in some cases, data results are being revealed already. Yet, full analysis will be presented in the data results section (Chapter 5). One reason for these early revelations in this methods section is to fully illustrate the different ways that respondents were contacted. Apart from Yaoundé, which was the key site for this study, I also carried out fieldwork in Ghent which enables me to make a cross-cultural analysis.

## 2.1. Sampling

Definition of the study sample population: The sample population for this study includes participants (16 – 18 years) from three high schools (*Lycée Bilingue d'Application* or LBA, *Lycée de Mendong*, and *Lycée d'Efoulan*), participants (18 – 34 years) from two universities (Yaoundé 1 and Yaoundé 2) and participants (18 – 24 years) from Ghent University. Socio-demographic characteristics, besides the age and school of these participants, included

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<sup>17</sup> Our fieldwork sites finally limited to three instead of four high schools because one high school refused to grant us permission to carry out research on their premises. Details will be explained below.

<sup>18</sup> GCE stands for the General Certificate of Education for English speaking students (GCE candidates), while French speaking students are called “*Baccalauréat* candidates.”

parental, gender, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Nevertheless, the latter two demographic variables (ethnic and religious backgrounds) were not incorporated in the data analysis procedure because during the analysis, I realized that participants' responses on, for example, ethnic background, were too diverse (about 150 different ethnicities were cited) and thus insignificant for a smaller survey. Concerning the religious factor, I realized that out of 151 participants who answered questionnaires at Yaoundé 1 and 2 University, there were only 6 (3.97%) who indicated being non-Christian (that is Muslim). Thus, I thought this percentage scale was insignificant to qualify religion in the social connectivity survey. Participants also included several individuals not belonging to the research sites, specifically young people whom we observed and with whom we participated in the ritual aspects of their daily life. As from December 2011 through January 2012, attention was also paid to personnel (educators), parents and mobile phone service (MTN and Orange) airtime credit resellers, known as "call box owners." Details about each of these phases are presented in a subsequent part of this chapter.

Identifying the unit of analysis: Units of analysis specifically included groups of young people (students) from the lower and upper sixth grades in high schools, as well as students from the first, second and third years at the two universities. Units of analysis also included educators (at the two universities), parents and mobile phone airtime credit resellers (interviewed face-to-face), and additionally several individuals we just watched during informal interactions (participant observation method). In other words, we included neither students from forms 1-5 (first to fifth grades) at the high schools nor masters students (fourth and fifth years or doctoral students) from the two universities (Yaoundé 1 and Yaoundé 2).

Selecting units of analysis for inclusion in the sample: Participants, apart from the university staff – which we needed to make appointments with – were selected at random at the various research sites. One key criterion was the participants' age, we had to qualify what is considered youth: the ages between 16 – 18 (high schools) and between 18 – 34 (universities). Nevertheless, the actual age of those who participated was between 16 and 24, and not above<sup>19</sup>. As concerned the parents, educators and airtime credit resellers, age was not a factor because we simply considered these participants as specialized informants, since

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<sup>19</sup> Youth identity and place are highly contested in Cameroon. One reason, as research suggests, is because young people "slowly ascend" to social adulthood (Fokwang, 2003), and find it difficult to "assume their rightful niches within families and households" (Grant, 2003:412). Consequently, the discussion of youth within the Cameroon context moves beyond the definition of United Nations (between 15-24 years). This is in conformity with Bucholtz's (2002: 526) assertion that pre-adolescents "are often considered as youths, whereas those in their 30's and 40's can also be considered as youths."

their opinions on mobile phone usage and risk behavior among young people helped us gather additional evidence not to be obtained from youths themselves.

## **2.2. Hypothesis**

The hypotheses for this study are as follows:

### **(a) Primary hypothesis**

A: Creating social ties through mobile phones is a means to achieve social goals, but it also increases the chance for sexual solicitations and consequently the risk of HIV transmission. The social goals consist in: raising status in the eyes of peers, enhancing means to gain material support and increasing longer-term life chances. The reason for the concomitant increased risk of HIV transmission are the barriers to condom use.

### **(b) Secondary hypotheses**

B: Social connectivity level, that is the number of previous, actual and possible sexual partners filed in the mobile phone, depends on social backgrounds, that is, whether participants' parents are farmers or in business or civil service.

C: Phone-to-phone time interactions with *mbomas* are a social connectivity strategy for young people to achieve social goals and lead to intergenerational and transactional vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

D: There are differences in sexual meaning and usage of mobile phones depending on cultural background. Consequently, an anthropological verification through a cross-cultural comparative approach can lay bare emerging ways through which mobile phones create, facilitate and maintain sexual activities in Yaoundé in a way it is unlikely in Ghent.

E: Young people in Yaoundé who employ social connectivity to achieve social goals and communicate about the use of condoms both with sexual partners and with their peers, are more likely to use condoms and practice safe sex.

## **2.3. Designing research questions**

The questions asked during fieldwork in Yaoundé's high schools and universities were different, and those asked to university students in Ghent slightly differed from those asked at Yaoundé's university students too. At the high schools, my research team and I

organized focus group discussions during which we read aloud the questionnaires, whereas at the universities, both in Yaoundé and in Ghent, we handed out the questionnaires and had the students fill them in without our presence. Note that both at high schools and at universities, we asked for the number of social contacts filed in the phones of the students concerned. By social contacts, we mean (1) the steady sexual partners, (2) the non-steady sexual partners (so partners the students have/had a sexual relationship with), and (3) the people who solicit sexual relations through the phone (regardless of the fact whether the sexual encounter eventually took place). Among the university students, and contrary to the high school students, we additionally inquired about the number of sexual life partners separately (which refers to partners (1) and (2) exclusively). With the additional informants (the staff of universities, the airtime credit sellers, the customer at restaurants and such), we conducted informal interviews. As such, the questions of the questionnaires differed according to these various data collection methods. Nonetheless, all the questions asked during field work in Ghent and Yaoundé followed the hypothesis from the following main question themes. The complete questionnaires are presented in Annex 2 and 3 respectively.

Firstly, in the course of designing research questions, I framed mobile phone as a culturally- technical variable through which social science research can emphasize the social dimension of health in a particular cultural background. Furthermore, I considered social connectivity as a “human technique and method of reaching specific goals” (Scupin and Decorse 2011:305).

Table 2 below represents a portion of the totality of the questions asked at the university students. As this table shows, the questions are coded according to three themes, and question MPASNS4 is related to one of the social goals (gift as material support is the first example of the three goals). The thematic coding of mobile phone and its usage is phrased “Mobile Phone As Social Network Service” and coded “MPASNS.” Under this theme, I generated a number of questions to get a clear idea of participants’ connectivity, that is their number of social contacts type (1), (2) and (3). Under the MPASNS-theme, I also inquired about the influence a gift can have in whether or not to accept sexual advances.

In the next phase, I generated another theme framed as “Friendship Mapping” and coded this “FM.” The questions ranged under this theme inquired about non-sexual friendship relations and about sexual relationships alike. I developed a number of sub-questions under this theme. I use these questions because data collected from social

connectivity through mobile phones have the potential to provide insights into the relational dynamics of individuals (Eagle and co-workers 2009). Moreover, questions under this theme particularly seek to investigate social network characteristics of youths, especially social tie norms and habits in Yaoundé and Ghent youth culture. As such, these questions were used to map who is connected to whom. Finally, the questions inquire about the reasons for setting up a friendship relation with a particular person.

The final theme is “Youth Culture Survey,” coded “YCS.” Questions generated under this theme refer to, and provide guidance on, emerging local socio-cultural practices, specifically about social networking in sexual/youth culture. These questions investigate emerging social networking and are similar to those which previous research had analyzed on new communication technology, showing that, through everyday use of mobile phones, new forms of social interactions had emerged. We tried to find out for instance what the informants' usual social network places are and why exactly they frequent these sites. Under YCS, we also asked questions related to condom use.

#### **(a) Research questions**

As stated above, the complete questionnaire is presented in Annex 3. The responses to all the questions were first ordered and then rated into risk scale in order to determine levels of vulnerability to HIV transmission. We discerned the following levels: (1) Low Risk, (2) Medium Risk, (3) High Risk and (4) Very High Risk. Table 2 shows an excerpt of the questions and responses. MPASNS2 refers to the second question that appeared under the MPASNS-theme (inquiring about the number of social contacts the respondent had filed in his/her phone). FM8 refers to the eighth question under the FM-theme (the number of sexual life partners). YCS5 refers to the fifth question of the YCS-theme (asking whether the respondent discusses the use of condoms with sexual solicitors).

Questions	code	Response type	Survey checks if low/high social contacts correlate with low/high risk behavior depending on condom use (safe sex practices)
Number of social contacts on mobile phone	MPASNS2	<10 +10<20 +20<30 >30	
Number of sexual life partners	FMS	0 <5 +5<10 > 10	
Gift and sexuality: offering a mobile phone in exchange for sex	MPASNS4	FALSE TRUE	
Other questions Discussing condoms with peers Yes or no to material support and sex	YCS 5 MPASNS3	YES NO YES NO	

**Table 2: Sample research questions and response types**

## (b) Hypothesis testing

In this section, my aim is to emphasize the relationship between significant variables in order to re-evaluate the hypothesis. It is noteworthy that these variables are based on the results of research questions as designed in Table 2.

### *Social connectivity and sexual lifetime partners*

VAR1: Mobile phone social connectivity level

*Question MPASNS2 was: How many social contacts type (1), (2) and (3) have you filed in your mobile phone?*

MPASNS2 = A (< 10) = low risk depends on condom use

MPASNS2 = B (+10 ≥ 20) = medium risk depends on condom use

MPASNS2 = C (+20 ≥ 30) = high risk depends on condom use

MPASNS2 = D (+30 >) = very high risk depends on condom use

VAR2: Sexual lifetime partners

*Question FM8 was: Could you estimate the number of people you had a sexual relationship with in your life? (= number of sexual life partners)*

FM8 = A (0) = low risk depends on condom use

FM8 = B (< 5) = medium risk depends on condom use

FM8 = C (+5  $\geq$  10) = high risk depends on condom use

FM8 = D (+10 >) = very high risk depends on condom use

From the above, MPASNS2 forms VAR1 (independent variable), while FM8 forms VAR2 (dependent variable) to determine which one of the four levels of Risk Sexual Behavior (RSB) applies. Therefore, the number of sexual life partners depends on the level of social connectivity (the number of sexual partners type 1,2 and 3 taken together, filed in the mobile phone). If social connectivity is high, the number of sexual life partners (the number of sexual partners type 1 and 2 taken together, filed in the mobile phone) may also be high and sexual communication and safe sex practices such as condom use may not be consistent.

When is the confirmation of our hypothesis obtained? If participants identified with high levels of social connectivity and many sexual life partners do not consistently use condoms, thus falling under the High Risk Groups (HRG) and Very High Risk Groups (VHRG), whereas, on the contrary, participants identified with low levels of social connectivity and less sexual life partners encounter less barriers to condom use and thus fall under the Low Risk Group (LRG) and Medium Risk Group (MRG).

Participants who communicate about condoms with sexual life partners are more likely to use them. This is tested by another question, that is, discussing condoms with sexual partners and peers, and is coded YCS5.

VAR1: Discussing condoms

*Question YCS5 was: Do you discuss the use of condoms with your sexual partners?*

Confirmation

YES - likelihood to use condoms, NO - less likely to use condoms, SOMETIMES – may be using condoms but use is inconsistent.



***Gift for sexual practices (MPASNS4) = A key variable for material support and sexuality***

*Question MPASNS4 was: can a gift influence you to give in to sexual advances?*

(Note that a gift comes in many shapes, it can be a sophisticated phone, some airtime credit, a safari trip, amongst others.)

The relevance of this variable is sustained by our finding that the provider MTN is aware of young people's flirtatious attitudes towards casual sexual partners who offer them regular airtime credits as a gift (see section 1.1.7.). In order to try and reduce processes which might lead to sexual risk behavior, MTN offers a one-hour free credit (between 10pm and 11pm) meant to call one particular steady sexual partner across the country. The aim is to prevent youths from turning to elder sexual solicitors who offer them regular airtime credits in exchange for sex. The question coded MPASNS4 was used to explore whether participants agree that a gift (such as MTN/Orange mobile phone credit, amongst others) may push them to accept sexual advances of *mbomas*. Thus, participants who, for example, fully agreed that offering a gift influences sexual behavior, are likely to have several sexual partners.

## **2.4. Data collection methods**

Data collection methods included library search and field study (questionnaires, focus group discussions and participant observation). The timeline for field study was as follows: Phase 1, fieldwork in Yaoundé from October 2010 until February 2011; Phase 2, fieldwork in Ghent from November 1, 2011 until November 30, 2011 and Phase 3, fieldwork in Yaoundé from December 2011 until January 2012.

### **2.4.1. Documentation search strategy**

The search for relevant literature included physical and online library methods. Below, I present both methods.

#### ***2.4.1.1. Physical libraries search method***

I acquired most literature for this study at the library of Ghent University, especially the sub-library of the African Languages and Cultures department which is co-owned by the

department of Comparative Study of Cultures. The intent was to locate key books and periodicals, especially on culture and health, applicable to the research questions of this study. Literary sources were from a broad range of disciplines such as African Studies, Languages and Literatures of Africa, Anthropology and Religious Studies. The books and periodicals were classified in different shelves according to disciplines and to an alphabetic index. The first shelf comprised collections on African history of civilization, which included the study by Nana Poku (see my citations of him in section 1.1.1.) entitled *AIDS in Africa: how the poor are dying* (2005), a study crucial for the state-of-the art definition in this study. Nevertheless, I needed to engage in a cross-disciplinary library resource survey, especially as at the above mentioned departments, I could not find any important study on mobile phone usage. Therefore, I moved to the library of the department of Sociology and Communication, which provided me with insightful literature on the state-of-art of social media (specifically about new communication technology) and youth culture, including its health impact (sexual risk). An example is Gerard Goggin's study *Cell phone culture: mobile technology in everyday life* (2006). Below, I present a triangular flow of the cross-disciplinary library resource search strategy.

Risky Sexual Behavior data collection through interdisciplinary sources/libraries

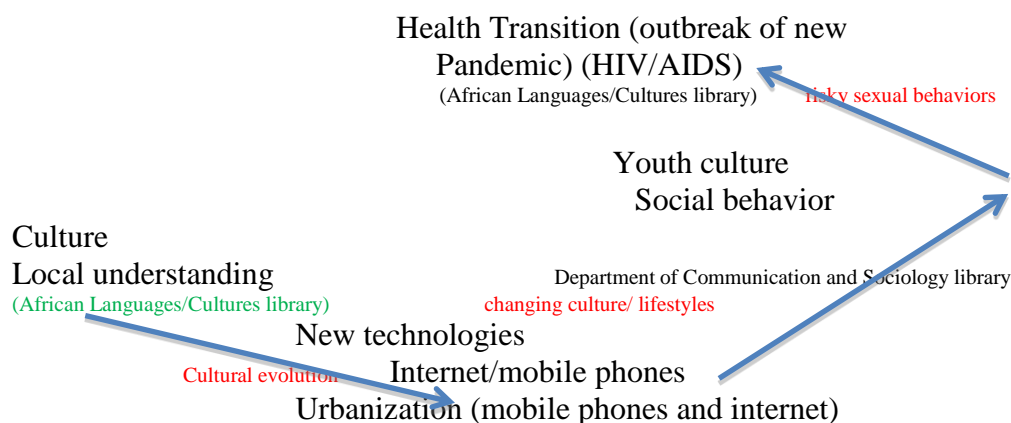


Figure 4: Arrow diagram showing the search strategy

Source: Author's research notes

#### 2.4.1.2. Online search method

Another search method included online libraries (JSTOR, PubMed, and Google Scholar)<sup>20</sup>. To ensure quick retrieval of significant journals as indexed by JSTOR, PubMed or Google Scholar, I sequentially used combinations of keywords like “mobile phone usage,” “internet,” “texting” with other keywords like “sexual risk behavior,” “condom use,” “HIV/AIDS,” and “young people.” In order to gain an in-depth knowledge about crosscutting issues related to HIV/AIDS transmission, I explored specific articles from high impact factor journals on HIV/AIDS such as *AIDS and Behavior*, *AIDS*, *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, and *JAIDS*. I also searched relevant documents from *Social Science and Medicine*, specifically because it incorporates ethnographic documents on medical anthropology and medical psychology. These journals, including reports published by global humanitarian agencies (UNAIDS, UNICED, WHO and UNDP) and by the World Bank, informed my research on the state-of-art of the challenges that the HIV/AIDS pandemic faces in Cameroon and in sub-Saharan African in general. In particular, the documents helped me to conceptually re-design my research questions and to collect appropriate data in a more efficient way.

Additionally, I used country data from the World Health Organization (WHO) reports to present HIV prevalence among children and adults in Cameroon from 1998 until 2011 (see section 1.1.2.). My analysis concerning Cameroon’s initial response to, and the epidemiological and statistical surveys on HIV/AIDS, were largely informed by WHO, UNAIDS, and UNDP health reports. Since these global agencies often proceed in collaboration with governments and local NGOs, they provide comprehensive and updated data concerning health issues. Besides these reports by the above-mentioned global agencies, I had a keen interest in journals such as *Information Technology and People* and *International Information Society*. These journals particularly informed my study on changing culture because they focus on the emergence of new communication technology.

Other sources included the *Annual Review of Anthropology* (ARA), *African Journal of Reproductive Health* (AJRH) and the *Journal of Family Planning* (JFP). While the ARA was more crucial in finding HIV/AIDS-related information on Cameroon, AJRH and JFP provided me with knowledge to synthesize disease spread through a mediated communication behavior lens. Essentially, all these journals contributed enormously in identifying the

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<sup>20</sup> University of Ghent pay fees to participate in many online libraries such as JSTOR archive collection, Google Scholar amongst others.

knowledge gap which my study aims to fill. Moreover, these journals led me to other journals on previous research on HIV in Cameroon.

#### **2.4.1.3. Search with focus on academic discipline**

In this section, I reveal why I integrated knowledge from different disciplines in this research. To begin with, literature for this study includes mostly, but not exclusively, anthropological literature. Indeed, this study is significantly about mobile phone use and sexual risk behaviors, yet, disciplines such as sociology provide more literature on new communication technology than anthropology. As such, an interdisciplinary stimulus for theoretical and empirical insight was necessary to broaden arguments and support the hypotheses. Furthermore, the previous knowledge of different disciplines allowed me to systematically discover current trends in new communication technology and sexual flirtation among young people. The interdisciplinary impetus came from sociology, psychology, gender and sexuality, information and communication technology (ICT), psychology, family and reproductive health, sexual health, epidemiology and youth culture, and it enabled me to identify what had been studied on sexuality and social connectivity through mobile phone usage so far. As such, it contributed in locating the gap which I wanted to fill in with my research, this gap consisting of empirical data the ensuing analysis of sexual flirtation as a result of mobile phone use. My aim is to identify mobile phone use as an indicator of sexual risk behaviors, in Yaoundé more specifically.

#### **2.4.2. Ethnographic fieldwork method (Phase 1)**

As I have indicated above, I conducted fieldwork in Yaoundé twice, that is, from October 2010 until February 2011 and from December 2011 until January 2012. During the first phase, I worked with three volunteers (one undergraduate in Anthropology and two undergraduates in History), all from Yaoundé 1 University. On top of this assistance, an anthropologist and university lecturer at Yaoundé 1 supervised our fieldwork. As he never came to the field himself, I reported to him each day after field study. He would, in turn, advise me on the best procedures to gather significant data. He also kept telling me that I have an insider's advantage since I did not need to spend time in trying to learn Pidgin English or French, as outsiders would have, to capture the local's view. Besides these two languages, participants also spoke *camfranglais* when drinking in bars, restaurants or nightclubs, and I could speak and understand this language too. An outsider in Yaoundé, not immersed in *camfranglais*, will usually find it difficult to capture the implicit or heuristic

sexual behavior practices of young people orally expressed through mobile phones. Consequently, I would say during fieldwork in Yaoundé, linguistic attention, especially during participant observation, was crucial and developed in French, English or *camfranglais*.

In the next section, I present the ethical considerations we needed to take into account during our field research. Indeed, the authorities of the institutions where I carried out my research and the Ministry of Scientific Research in Yaoundé stipulate that researchers should prove that their study designs are in accordance with the ethical standards to meet human experimentation, especially when it concerns sexually-sensitive research.

#### ***2.4.2.1. Written permissions***

According to the Cameroon ministerial order (number: 079/A/MPH/DS of October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1987), researchers conducting health studies have to comply with certain rules, such as to obtain an ethical approval or clearance before the commencement of the study, to obtain genuine informed consent from research participants and finally to ensure the confidentiality of participants recruited for the study. In response to this ministerial order, I proceeded as follows with respect to the codes of ethics: (1) submission of written applications to obtain research permissions from rectors of Yaoundé 1 and Yaoundé 2 universities, and (2) submitted written applications to obtain oral or written permissions from principals of LBA, *Lycée d'Efoulan* and *Lycée de Mendong*. In these applications, I included the following important formal declarations: (1) which research sites I had identified, (2) the procedures I planned to use for the interviews and for the collection of ethnographic data, and (3) how, when and for whom I was going to collect and analyze the data. During my fieldwork in Ghent, I carried a written permission with me, issued by my doctoral supervisor, which I could show to the students to prove that I was allowed to approach them in order to collect data.

The first requests for permission were submitted on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2010, three days after my arrival at Yaoundé (see sample authorization in the Annex 4). At Yaoundé 1 University, the application letter was given to the security guard who then transferred it to the courier department. This department is located at the main entrance of the *rectorat* of Yaoundé 1 University. After a few minutes, a guard brought a receipt indicating that our application had been registered. This guard belonged to the security squad, called campus police, created by the Cameroon minister of higher education, also known as “*Ministère du*

*l'Enseignement Supérieure*” (in French) to guard the campuses of the Yaoundé 1 and 2 universities. He told us that after the application reaches the rector’s office, a decision would be taken approximately within a week. Now it seemed to us that we had accomplished our job at this main campus of Yaoundé 1.

We then moved to the other campus of Yaoundé 1, *École Normale Supérieure* (ENS), to continue with the application submission procedure. When we arrived at the ENS campus, we saw a student teacher and asked him to guide us to the office of the director of ENS. The student told us that if we were coming for any academic inquiry, then we had to visit the department of research affairs first. He guided us to the department of research affairs where we submitted the second application to the secretary of the director of research affairs. The secretary (female) gave me a receipt acknowledging that I submitted an application for permission to collect data at ENS campus. She told me to come back the next day (19 October 2010) to check if the permission was ready.

Then we decided to go to *Lycée Bilingue d’Application* (LBA) or Government practicing high school Yaoundé, which was also one of the research sites where we had to submit an application for permission. The LBA campus lies within five minutes’ walk of the ENS campus, allowing us to minimize costs during research as we walked and did not have to take a taxi. The school (LBA) which is fenced with barbed wire, made us to think that there would be a guard at the gate but there was none. Instead, the gate door was open, we entered smoothly and the first person we saw was a woman coming out of the staff room. We quickly approached her and asked her to help us. We told her we were looking for the principal of LBA. She asked what we were out for and we told her that we would need to collect some data on mobile phone usage and sexual behavior from the students of LBA. She said “ok” and then led us to the principal’s office. To my surprise, the principal read my application immediately and asked me to draft a written permission the way I would want it to look like. “Once you bring the document tomorrow, I will just put a stamp and sign,” he said. However, he insisted that once I would have the permission, we should only interview participants who were interested without having to persuade them to participate in my research. I told him “yes sir, I will do just that.”

It was still before lunchtime so we decided to visit the other high schools – *Lycée de Biyem-Assi*, *Lycée de Mendong* and *Lycée d’Efoulan*. *Lycée de Biyem-Assi* was not as near as Yaoundé 1 to ENS or ENS to LBA, so we took a taxi. Among all the schools we visited,

*Lycée de Biyem-Assi* was the most restricted one. It is completely fenced, and the gate doors seemed to be locked all the time. Thus, to get inside the campus, we had to knock on the gate door. A guard opened the door and immediately asked in French what we wanted. We told him we wanted to see the principal in order to ask for permission to interview students concerning the use of mobile phones and risky sexual behaviors. He did not seem to allow us to see the principal until we proved we had some documents (such as an authorization letter from the institution where I came from), including our national identity cards. While my colleagues presented their Cameroonian national ID cards, I presented my passport. He collected the documents and the application form for permission and then asked us to wait while he closed the door. We noticed he photocopied our personal identification documents before going to the principal. The guard came back a few minutes later and told us the principal wanted to see us. We entered through the gate and moved straight to the principal's office. He told us he had read our application and understood our mission. "However, I can only give you permission if you present a letter addressed to me personally by Ghent University," he said. I told him I have an official letter from my research adviser from the Ghent University in Belgium, as well as additional documents concerning my fieldwork from the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy at Ghent University<sup>21</sup>. Notwithstanding all the explanations I gave, the principal insisted that unless he received a formal letter from Ghent University, he could not allow us to interview his students. I told him that I would try to contact my research supervisor in Ghent and if possible I will come back to see him. He said "that is it," thus, we left.

It was about lunchtime so we took a taxi to Bonas (the residential area for Yaoundé 1 students and also the place where my colleagues were living) to have lunch and discuss our next steps. At the restaurant in Bonas, as we were having lunch, I was attentive, observing the way young people used their phones because I knew that, after the permissions were granted, the next step would be to do exactly that.

After lunch, we decided to go to *Lycée de Mendong* and took another taxi as the distance was not so near. At sight, *Lycée de Mendong* seemed a recent school, with its new infrastructure, including story buildings. This school is located on a hill that overlooks other parts of Eastern Yaoundé (the neighborhoods Biyem-Assi, Dakar, Nsam and Monté Juvence).

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<sup>21</sup> I presented a letter from my doctoral research supervisor and another letter from the Faculty of Philosophy, Arts, and Humanities' *Commissie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek* (CWO) at Ghent University. This letter stated that the faculty granted me financial support (600 euro) to carry out research in Cameroon. Still, the principal of *Lycée de Biyem-Assi* rejected it.

As there was no fence as at the previous school, we went straight to the center of the campus. We saw some students hanging around and we approached one of them. This student then led us to the principal's office which was on a second the floor of the building. When we arrived at the office, we first of all knocked on the door and then moved on to greet her as she asked us to come in. We told her we were there to seek permission to interview her students on the use of mobile phones and risky sexual behavior. As soon as she was ready to answer us, a group of people, colleagues, I suppose, came into her office and drew her attention. She quickly asked us to wait outside for a while. After about fifteen to twenty minutes, she called us to come in again and we did. She told us that we did not need any permission especially if we promised not to use any devices (cameras or recorders and such). Secondly, she told us to be very discreet and only proceed the way students prefer. For example, we could not insist or persuade any student when he/she would be unwilling to participate in our study. So finally, this was the only school where our permission was given orally.

It was about 2pm now and we decided to go to the last high school, *Lycée d'Efoulan*. The school was not fenced and by sight, we could locate the principal's office immediately since it had a written sign at the door showing *le proviseur* (in French) meaning the principal. Entering the office, we did not meet the principal but fortunately, the secretary was there. The secretary asked us to wait for a while since the principal would be there in a few minutes. When the principal arrived, he greeted us and the secretary introduced our mission to him immediately. He read the application and asked us to come and get the permission before Friday.

After *Lycée de d'Efoulan*, I decided to go to the Mendong neighborhood where my adviser was living. I told him what had been done that day. He told me not to be worried about the *Lycée de Biyem-Assi* issue, rather that I should begin immediately with any school that has granted me permission so far. He then advised me to go to Yaoundé 2 University, the next day. This university is located in Soa, at the outskirts of Yaoundé city, about 15km from Yaoundé city center and thirty minutes by public transport. So the following day, we took a bus to Soa. We had to take a taxi from Cradat<sup>22</sup> (our meeting point) to central town first, more precisely between the Cameroon Airlines (CAMAIR) and *Banque des Etats de l'Afrique Centrale* (BEAC)<sup>23</sup> buildings. From there, we took a bus directly to Yaoundé 2 University. As

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<sup>22</sup> *Centre Regionale Africain d'Administration du Travail* (CRADAT) or African Regional center for labor administration (English).

<sup>23</sup> Bank of central African states (in English).



these buses mostly transport students, the drivers always stop at the entrance of the university. As a result of this specific stop at the main entrance, we arrived at the campus very soon, at about 10am. In the same way as we registered the letter at Yaoundé 1 University, we also did at this campus.

#### **2.4.2.2. *Application for permission feedbacks***

After distributing applications for permission, it was now time to visit the concerned schools to collect the permissions. Due to our disagreement with the principal of *Lycée de Biyem-Assi*, and the oral permission from the principal of *Lycée de Mendong*, we now had to wait for only five responses: that of Yaoundé 1 University, of the ENS campus of Yaoundé 1 University, of Yaoundé 2 University, of *Lycée Bilingue d'Application* (LBA) and of *Lycée d'Efoulan*. The next day, we went to the campus of Yaoundé 1 University but the permission was not ready. We then moved to *Ecole Normale Supérieure* (ENS) campus, where, fortunately, the permission was ready and issued to us. We continued to *Lycée Bilingue d'Application* (LBA) and handed the draft permission which the principal initially asked me to write. He read the document, signed it after putting an official stamp and finally issued it to me. At this point, we only had two sites left to get permission feedbacks. Two days later, I went to *Lycée de d'Efoulan* by myself to get the permission. I did not meet the vice principal this time. However, he had prepared the document and given it to his secretary. Finally, on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2010, I went to Yaoundé 2 University to get the permission, it had been signed already but I could not get it from the courier office (details in 2.4.3.1., in the Problems Encountered section).

#### **2.4.2.3. *Ethical considerations and approval***

To get the permissions to collect data was the first step of this study's ethical procedure. Compliance with the ethical demand was necessary, in part, to avoid any administrative implications that could disrupt order or cause hostility. The Research on Ethics Committee (REC) standards stipulate that conducting health studies needs to comply with the following rules: (1) obtaining ethic approval/clearance before the commencement of the research study, (2) obtaining genuine informed consent from research participants, and (3) ensuring confidentiality for people recruited for the study (Munung et al. 2012). The principals themselves seemed to be aware of these of ethics. For example, I mentioned that at *Lycée de Mendong*, the principal authorized us to collect data without any written document, yet, she warned us not to persuade any student if we felt they were unwilling to participate. In other

words, we had to rely on their voluntary participation rather than trying to persuade them. Furthermore, the questionnaires for this study comprised a statement of consent on the very first page to inform participants what we were looking for and how their participation would contribute to help us gather data, yet only through their willingness.

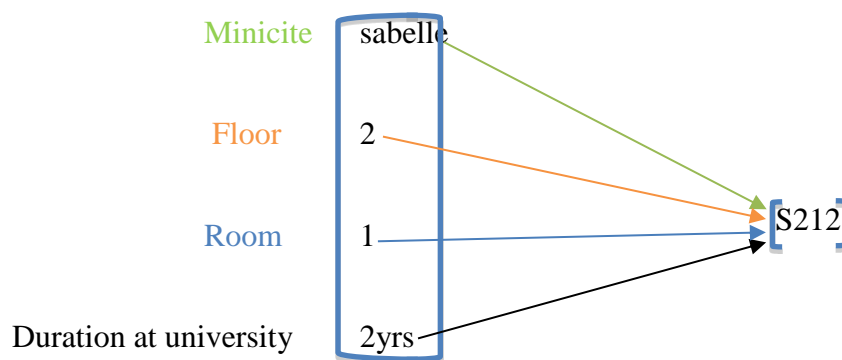
During our research, we took into account the following ethical considerations. Firstly, because of the sensitive nature of the study, participants' names were veiled through a code name or through a pseudonym (see sample in Table 3 below). We concealed their true names not only for ethical concerns, but to assure anonymity was also necessary to enhance the validity and reliability of the information given by respondents. Indeed, as far back as 1930's, Lee (1933) pointed out that if a researcher fails to veil participants' identity, the relationship between the researcher and the participants is likely to become hedged with mistrust, concealment and dissimulation. This study indeed involves a health survey that equally required face-to-face encounters with participants and often, according to Dickson-Swift et al. (2006), this kind of survey involves questions about sensitive and private aspects of participants' lives. Furthermore, people are less talkative when it comes to matters concerning their health anyway, so we needed to assure confidentiality.

As for the codes themselves, we were inspired by researchers on health such as McDonald and Friedlin (2008) and Murphy (2011) who have used code generation methods to identify patients' information from various kinds of clinical data documents, including laboratory and narrative reports. Similarly, we generated coded names for participants using certain matrices. These matrices included: Student home =? Floor =? Room No. =? (see sample in Table 3 below). For example, in Ghent, a student who lives in Home Boudewijn (B), second floor (2), room 14 (14) will be coded as B214. An example of code generation to assure participant confidentiality is represented below.

In Cameroon, we also coded the participant's names. However, the code names were only generated for participants who answered questionnaires and for those who participated in focus group discussions, not for the participants we met during the more informal encounters or during participant observation. The latter were given either code names or pseudonyms. As for those who participated in the FGDs, we used letters of the alphabet, the first letter of participants' school, his/her class (lower or upper) and gender. For example, if a male participant was about to talk at *Lycée de Mendong*, we would write M for *Lycée de Mendong*, L for lower sixth class, A as his name and (m) as his gender (thus MLAm) or M

for *Lycée de Mendong*, U for upper sixth class, E as his name and (m) for gender, thus (MUEf). For girls, we could write M for *Lycée de Mendong*, I as her name, L for lower sixth class and (f) for her gender (thus MILf).

However, to clearly make a distinction, I decided to code participants in the first schools (*Lycée de Mendong* and LBA) with vowel letters such as A, E and consonants letters such as T, Y for *Lycée de d'Efoulan* (see diagram below). Also note that the letter Y was used as a vowel because we had to choose 12 participants in each class (that is 6 girls and 6 boys). With the addition of Y, we had six vowels to fit six girls and six vowels to fit six boys. Also note that I had planned to have *Lycée de Biyem-Assi* participants also coded with consonant letters so as to have two schools for vowels codes and two for consonants, unfortunately, as I mentioned above, we did not get any permission from the *Lycée de Biyem-Assi* principal. The aim of this vowel/consonant and gender code generation was to facilitate data analysis process after fieldwork.



**Table 3: Sample participant generation code for university students (Yaoundé)**

Source: Fieldworks notes (2010)

	<i>Lycée de Mendong (LS)</i>	<i>Lycée de Mendong (US)</i>	<b>LBA (LS)</b>	<b>LBA (US)</b>	<i>Lycée de d'Efoulou (LS)</i>	<i>Lycée de d'Efoulou (US)</i>
	MLA(f),MLA(m)	MUA(m),MUA(f)	LLA(m),LLA(f)	LUA(f),LUA(m)	ELA(m),ELA(f)	EUA(f),EUA(f)
	MLE(m),MLE(f)	MUE(m),MUE(f)	LLE(m),LLE(f)	LUE(f),LUE(m)	ELE(m),ELE(f)	EUE(m),EUE(m)
	MLI(m), MLI(f)	MUI(f),MUI(m)	LLI(f), LLI(m)	LUI(m),LUI(f)	ELI(m),ELI(f)	EUI(m),EUI(f)
	MLO(f),MLO(m)	MUO(f),MUO(m)	LLO(m),LLO(f)	LUO(f),LUO(m)	ELO(f),ELO(m)	EUO(m),EUO(f)
	MLU(f),MLU(m)	MUU(m),MUU(f)	LLU(f),LLU(m)	LUU(m),LUU(f)	ELU(f),ELU(m)	EUU(f),EUU(m)
	MLY(m),MLY(f)	MUY(f),MUY(m)	LLY(f),LLY(m)	LUY(m),LUY(f)	ELY(f),ELY(m)	EUY(f),EUY(m)
<b>TOTAL</b>	12(6f, 6m)	12(6f, 6m)	12(6f,6m)	12(6f,6m)	12(6f,6m)	12(6f,6m)

**Table 4: Sample participant generation code for high school students (Yaoundé)**

Source: Fieldwork notes (2010)

Participants' codes as illustrated in Table 4 were meant to respond to the ethical compliance of the anonymity of participants of focus group discussions (FGDs). Coding for participant observation, however, did not require any ethical consideration (especially not that of securing anonymity) because the investigation method was informal. Nonetheless, we did apply some coding in our own interest as it was more suitable for analysis. Therefore, during participant observation, we coded participants according to the selected research sites, for instance participants at the Green Valley Bar were coded as V1, V2, V3 (that is Valley 1, Valley 2, and Valley 3, etc.). In the same way, participants at Katios were coded as K1, K2, K3 (that is Katios 1, Katios 2, and Katios 3, etc.), those from Djeuga as D1, D2, D3, D4 (that is Djeuga 1, Djeuga 2, and Djeuga 4, etc.) and those in restaurants are coded as RES1, RES2, RES 3 (etc.).

#### **2.4.2.4. Problems encountered in the field**

One of the practical problems encountered during fieldwork was the disagreement with the principal of *Lycée de Biyem-Assi*. As I mentioned above, the reason for his refusal was my failure to present an official letter by Ghent University concerning my research addressed to him. As all efforts to convince him had become fruitless, we decided to alter our data collection procedure (both on the basis of the study design and of time planning) by cancelling the planned visits to *Lycée de Biyem-Assi*. The consequence was the disruption of

a series of activities initially planned and consequently the loss of perceived and significant data. Nevertheless, self-report data from participants in other schools (LBA, *Lycée de Mendong* and *Lycée de d'Efoulan*) compensated the lack of data from *Lycée de Biyem-Assi*.

The second problem was the time factor associated with meetings in high schools. Classes for these schools usually begin at 7am and end at 3pm (Mondays – Fridays). There is a customary break period of about thirty minutes in-between, that is from 12noon until 12:30pm. It was difficult to arrange any focus group discussions during this period, especially as it was lunchtime. Thirty minutes – for students who would want to participate – was not only a limited amount of time, but even an insufficient one to get systematic answers that would comprise suitable evidence to achieve study goals. The best and only alternative was to attract students who would be willing to participate in the study after 3pm. Yet, as it appeared, most parents or guardians of these students expected them at home immediately. Therefore, we developed a sort of pre-time consultation approach that is, consulting students during the thirty minutes break (12noon – 12:30pm). The aim was to identify those who were not obliged to be at home immediately after 3pm and to find out whether they wanted to participate.

The third problem during fieldwork was getting permissions not only in *Lycée de Biyem-Assi* but also at Yaoundé 1 and Yaoundé 2 University. Firstly, both in Yaoundé 1 and in Yaoundé 2, the problem was due to the attendants at the courier (mail) department who kept telling us that the directors of research affairs had not yet signed the permission even when it was likely that the directors had. Secondly, when these attendants actually acknowledged us that the documents were signed, they would find ways to twist their story. For example, the story changed from the document not being signed into the director not being in office to issue the signed document. In reality however, documents that were signed and ready for issuance, like the permissions we came for, were often handed by these directors to the attendants at the courier office. In the next section, I am going to present details of the interview and of the participant observation methods.

#### ***2.4.2.5. Interviews at the university campuses***

Initially I had to choose which methods to use where, when, how and for whom. In order to develop an appropriate methodology, I always incorporated the research methods of anthropologists as guidance. For example, some medical anthropologists like Gravelee

(2010:81) recommend three broad categories of research methods in health research, namely: systematic observation, participant observation and interview methods. At the university campuses, we gathered information through the questionnaires as part of our corpus of quantitative data. Furthermore, we applied participant observation and informal interviewing among university students who gathered at bars, restaurants and nightclubs. From a theoretical viewpoint of Power (1998), we thought this additional qualitative research could give us the opportunity to examine crucial issues such as the trends and incidence of sexual risk behaviors among young people.

#### **2.4.2.5.1. Interviews at the ENS campus of Yaoundé 1 University**

As soon as the permissions to authorize the collection of data were ready, we started doing fieldwork using our key methods at the university campuses, that is, participant observation and handing out of questionnaires. The first research site was ENS, which we visited from Mondays through Fridays from 8am onwards. At ENS campus, we walked around and collected an average of two filled in questionnaires within an hour, so we had done eight students by noon when we called it a day. We noticed that many students would have liked to participate in the study but they lacked the time. Most of them had the habit to arrive at the campus about five minutes before classes started. After classes, they returned home immediately to rest for a while before they would come back, probably in the afternoon or evening, for more classes. Therefore, the best strategy for us was to constantly hang around waiting for exceptional cases, that is the few students who were not in a hurry to attend classes or to go home. These students often sat at small lobby stands, either reading or socializing with their peers. Thus, as we approached them at these stands, we simply asked if they were willing to participate in our study by filling in some questionnaires.

A few days before we concluded fieldwork at ENS, the permission for data collection from Yaoundé 1 University was ready and issued. Hence, the next research site was Yaoundé 1 University's main campus.

#### **2.4.2.5.2. Interviews at the Yaoundé 1 University main campus**

It was about mid-November when we started with our questionnaires at the campus of Yaoundé 1 University. The first thing we noticed at this campus was that many students were planning to go on holidays (Christmas vacation), so we speeded up and tried to get about 80 filled-in questionnaires in one week time. The interesting thing at Yaoundé 1 University is

that even when students were not attending a class, they hung around at the campus. So we moved around the campus stopping at each of the many small lobbies or leisure stands covered by trees. Both female and male students could be seen sitting at these lobby spots when they were not having classes. Another site that we found convenient to meet students, was the place near Amphitheatre 700 where several photocopies-services are situated.<sup>24</sup> Students who did not have classes often went there to make photocopies, or some went there simply to accompany their friends. After photocopying, they usually sat on the benches nearby drinking some soft drinks. As a result of this hang around attitude, accessibility to the students was easy and fast and consequently sped up the interview process. However, notwithstanding this accessibility, the students on this campus preferred answering to the questions of the questionnaires orally instead of filling them in by themselves.

After collecting data at Yaoundé 1 University campus, we went to Yaoundé 2 University to check if the permission was ready, but the situation had not changed, that is, they told me the same story about either the director not being around or the visiting hour not having started yet. One of my research assistants suggested to see the head of the student union to complain about this situation. We moved immediately to search the head of the student union who had just finished eating in the student restaurant at that moment. I told him that I came here to get a permission to collect data but each time I came, authorities in charge told me a different story. This student head asked me when I applied for permission. I told him it was already about three weeks since I did that and his countenance proved that something seemed not right. He told us to wait as he went to the courier office. However, he warned us not to come closer, insisting we should wait either where we were or at the main gate of the campus (outside). We told him instead we would wait for him right here. He left and after about thirty minutes, he came with a document in an envelope addressed to me. He gave me the envelope and when I opened it, I saw it contained a letter which had been drafted and signed, giving me permission to carry out research at the campus.

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<sup>24</sup> Amphitheatre 700 is one among about ten main lecture halls at the campus. It is called Amphitheater 700, also called Amphi 700 because it is believed to accommodate 700 students at a time. Other amphitheaters include amphi 1000, amphi 2002, etc. These amphitheaters were constructed during the government of late president Ahmadou Ahidjo. At that time, Yaoundé 1, initially called Yaoundé University, was a federal (from the time Cameroon became federal government) and sole university in Cameroon. Therefore, the university had problems of overpopulation, thus, large lecture halls (these amphitheaters) were constructed to solve the problem. In the history department, up to 1000 history students could enroll for first year (freshmen) followed by law (about 1500).

#### **2.4.2.5.3. Interviews at Yaoundé 2 University campus**

Having permission from Yaoundé 1 University, I thought Yaoundé 2 University would be the next place to collect data. However, it was December 2011 and many students were rushing home to join their families to celebrate Christmas. The majority of Cameroonians are Christians, and Christmas is not just a day of going to church, but also a day to interact, share and enjoy a good time together with one's family. Thus, families expect their members, including the students, to come home from the first week of December onwards<sup>25</sup>. In addition, after 15<sup>th</sup> December, traffic becomes difficult, so many students prefer to leave Yaoundé sooner. Consequently, we suspended the field trip to Yaoundé 2 University until January 2011. However, classes were still going on at the universities but only students whose parents live in Yaoundé or its peripheries were attending classes until the official closing date, usually 21<sup>st</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup> December. As it became clear that we would have to wait until January to restart surveys at Yaoundé 2 University, we thought this was the right time to carry out participant observation. Therefore, instead of continuing with questionnaires at Yaoundé 2 University, we altered our study procedure and time schedule again by giving priority to participant observation at bars, restaurants and nightclubs in downtown Yaoundé.

#### **2.4.2.6. Participant observation**

Participant observation entailed informal observations of, and interactions and conversations with, countless individuals targeted to create a systematic record of their everyday life, especially regarding mobile phone use. Power (1998) has stressed the importance of participant observation as much as he has stressed the importance of quantitative research (in section 2.4.2.5. above). He mentions that qualitative research as the case of participant observation is pivotal to our understanding of the socio-behavioral aspects of HIV. Accordingly, through the participant observation method, we gathered data containing implicit and explicit interpretations of socio- behavioral aspects of HIV in places such as bars, restaurants and nightclubs. In particular, we selected potential recruitment sites in the neighborhoods of Bonas, Chateau and Obili (with bars and restaurants) and downtown Yaoundé (with two nightclubs). At these sites, we focused on mobile phone use for social and sexual linkage among young people and their sexual partners. Furthermore, we observed and

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<sup>25</sup> This is also because most parents feel that this period is a rush period and full of risks because of the many highway motor accidents, especially along the Yaoundé-Douala road. Each year, especially in December, Cameroon witnesses ghastly motor accidents along this highway. Therefore, it is difficult to encounter students on a campus as from mid-December.



created a systematic record of everyday use of mobile technology to participate in social practices and noticed how phone-mediated activities had practical implications (Taylor and Harper 2002, Katz 2002). One example of the such practical implication, according to Kwaku Kyem and LeMarie (2006), is that mobile phones are status symbols and fashion accessories for young people.

In each of the sites, we collected data through notes. Since we were four in our team, each person had a different function which we coded each time according to the research site. For example, at the restaurants in the Bonas neighborhood, my function was to use research questions to provoke participants' implicitly and explicitly sexually laden actions through mobile phones. As such, my code at Bonas was C1, that is colleague number one responsible for questions. Code C2 was the code for the researcher responsible for participant name coding as well as for taking down observational notes. Code C3 was given to the researcher who assisted C2 in taking notes during informal interactions, and C4 was responsible for taking notes of non-verbal cues such as implicit and explicit gestures between men and women during interactions. Take note that in some instances, I will refer to one of my team of four as a colleague and in others, for the purpose of clarity, as C2, C3 or C4. In the latter case, if I want to refer to the colleague who was responsible for non-verbal cues, I will simply write C4. Coding ourselves did not have the same logic as coding participants, per se, rather it was a strategy to help smoothen data analysis afterwards.

#### **2.4.2.6.1. Observation methods starts: entering the world of young people in bars**

We started observation at Bonas (see Figure 2) on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2010, at about 7pm Cameroon local time. Before going any further, I will first provide a brief description of Bonas. Bonas is an abbreviation of Bonamoussadi<sup>26</sup>, a neighborhood in Douala city, and it is not an Beti name as other ethnically-Beti place names in Yaoundé. Bonas is a student residential area and for some reasons, which I am yet to discover, named Bonamoussadi. The site lies between the slopes of Ngoa-ekelle and the Obili neighborhood. Bonas is notorious for its nightlife, it is a *carrefour de la joie* (Ndjio, 2005), or crossroad of enjoyment, to university students. The initial place where we decided to collect data, was a bar called Green Valley Bar.

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<sup>26</sup> See [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quartiers\\_de\\_Douala](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quartiers_de_Douala) about this neighborhood Bonamoussadi in Douala city.

The reasons for choosing Green Valley Bar are as follows. First, this bar opens every day and almost twenty-four hours each day, hence it is the most notorious drinking spot for university students to socialize. Secondly, we rather selected a bar in the first place instead of other places like shops, where they gather too, since the additional drinking offered in bars allows young people to express and experience in-group leisure. In the course of deploying these activities, they utilize mobile phones, often to facilitate interaction with their peers. Furthermore, we noticed that going to a bar was a “kind of end of the day activity” to students, having a beer being the most sought for activity after classes. Additionally, drinking, as researchers in social science and biology have stated, comes with socio-economic and cultural aspects which facilitate the collecting of data on social connectivity and sexual risk behaviors. Biologists, for example, emphasize the biological function that beer has in the human system, while anthropologists focus on how drinking is an extension of human communication. In particular, De Garine and De Garine (2001) have noted that during drinking, many etic and emic aspects of behavior can be recorded, and both are valuable to interpret youth culture. By etic, the authors mean aspects of behavior such as students’ socialization whereas the emic aspects of behavior refer to students’ drinking habit. In the next section, I present the procedure of data collecting at Green Valley Bar, the first case study of our fieldwork in Yaoundé.

#### **2.4.2.6.2. Case study 1: Mobile phone usage at Green Valley Bar**

In the Green Valley, the first method to interview those I considered as specialized informants and these were the waitresses. Secondly, we sat down on the table waiting to interact with other people who came to drink in the bar. Thirdly, as it appears Cameroonians like watching soccer when drinking in bars, we thought it would be a good strategy to interact with most of the students through the 1990 world cup which a waitress played through a video cassette. Through these approaches (drinking together, watching soccer together), we succeeded to have several interactions in which we asked questions about mobile phone and sexual facilitation in Yaoundé.

As we entered Green Valley Bar, and before we settled down to have drink, I approached the waitresses to ask them a few questions. Anthropological inquiry lays emphasis on participant observation to collect data from members of the culture who have specialized knowledge of the group (Winkelman 2009), and I figured these women would probably have specialized knowledge about mobile phone usage and sexuality. The analysis of their responses, which I

present in the Chapter 5, section 5.1.1., indeed broadened my understanding of the relation between text messages and mobile phone calls and sexuality, in the context of Green Valley Bar.

We were four of us (the research team) drinking at one table, and at the neighboring table sat a group of four as well, two females and two males. At the first quick look around the bar, we noticed many people who expressed their wish to watch football channels while drinking, but there was no live football match going on. When one customer asked a waitress to play a football video, she did so by playing an old cassette of the Cameroonian football encounter with Romania during the 1990 World Cup in Italy. The match quickly brought us into interaction with others, especially as both my group and the one at the table next to ours developed an interest in this football video. As the match went on, we made comments on Cameroonian players, especially on Roger Milla. This heightened our pleasure of drinking and I thought it was time to figure out a strategy to bring the two tables together so that we could get the information on mobile phone usage plus sexuality, which we needed. I told them it would be interesting if we joined the two tables and offered them drinks. Consequently, we joined the two tables and were now eight people sitting around.

As I was confident about starting to collect data on human sexual behavior triggered by mediated communication, I thought that, in this selected research site, TV and beer were helping us as observers to understand the social aspects of risk behavior. As such, the main goal now was to know how mediated communication shaped the interaction and relationship among the first four participants. After much talk about football, and to push the topic of conversation towards the right direction, I took out my Motorola phone and looked keenly on its screen, stating my battery was low. In response to my worries, one of my research colleagues (C4) looked at his Nokia and said: "I prefer Nokia, when I charge the battery, it can last for three days." When C3 then asked where I bought my phone, my colleague's question attracted the others' attention. In the first place, I thought C3 was now playing my role in raising a research question, yet, I answered him by saying that: "I bought mine in Belgium." I then quickly took my responsibility by asking them too where they had bought their phones. I took my time to ask this question to each of the participants at the table. One colleague (C2), who had a Nokia, said he bought it at Avenue Kennedy in down-town Yaoundé, and the other colleague (C3) said he bought his at Mokolo market. This answer session continued involving the male participants (V1 and V2) who said they bought their

phones – they both had a Siemens – in a Chinese shop at Biyem-Assi neighborhood, and they did so together at the very same day. From this answer, I understood they probably were close friends. As for the female participants, who both carried a Motorola, one of them (V3) said she received hers as a present and the other (V4) stated someone bought it for her in Douala. After the two women said how they got their phones, this made me to reflect on Nyamnjoh's article *Married but available* about Yaoundé's women to whom men offer airtime credits and even phones from men (Nyamnjoh 2009). As a result of this quick reflection, I whispered to C2 and C3 (responsible for note taking) to jot down the link between what the ladies said and Nyamnjoh's findings. My intention was to make sure the data would be easily analyzed during data analysis (see details in data results and analysis chapter).

The next step was trying to know where the men lived and what they did. To do this, I first of all introduced myself, saying I studied in Belgium but I had come to Cameroon to conduct studies on mobile phone use, and I then went on to introduce my colleagues too. On their part, they introduced themselves.

Next, I moved on to make a statement which generated an insightful argument. I said I could not imagine how we could have arranged a meeting among the four of us here and now, if there had not been any mobile phones. At this point, my focus was how mobile phones play a role in young people networks. I listened carefully to the women who said that without their mobile phones, they felt lost, as they could not get in touch with others. I asked the four of them in a jokingly way how they arranged this meeting here today, and at this particular time. They answered: "We just communicated through phone." One of the women said: "The men called us and we responded by texting them." Then one of the men (V2) stated: "I find it boring to compose text messages, women are good at that," adding that "when you have appointments with them, they simply text and we have the responsibility to call." His colleague (V1) continued by saying that "women prefer texting because texting is cheap, they don't like to spend any money, but even when we send them airtime credits, still they don't call us."

There were many participants whose name we did not ask and code, yet I will mention names of those we did code as follows: V1 (male and teacher at *Lycée d'Esson* in Yaoundé), V2 (male and civil servant at the National Social Insurance Fund Yaoundé), V3 (female and student at Yaoundé 1 University) and V4 (female and student at Yaoundé 1 University).

#### **2.4.2.6.3. Case study 2: Observations at the Katios and Djeuga nightclubs**

It was now Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2010, just two days after our first interaction with the participants of Green Valley Bar in Bonas. Similar to bars, nightclubs are spaces for youth leisure too, and as subsequent sites to do fieldwork, we chose two nightclubs, Katios and Djeuga<sup>27</sup>. My colleagues stated that the best days to conduct informal interactions over there, were probably Fridays and Saturdays.

When we arrived at Katios, we saw young people queuing up in a long line, while others were just hanging around. There was a lot of phone calling and texting done, to make sure that friends and partners would meet. My colleagues had just completed from Yaoundé University and so they were more familiar with these participants than me. As Bartunek and Reis Louis (1992) put it on the composition of a research team of people who differ in their physical and psychological connectedness to the research setting, my colleagues enjoyed the insider advantage which turned out very useful during our research. As the entrance fee to the club was 60,000 FRS CFA for two to three persons, but this amount could be negotiated when in a group, I suggested we would join a group so that we could all pay less<sup>28</sup>. As such, we approached a group of ten young girls and boys and asked if we could join them in order to benefit from the entry fee discount. They welcomed the idea, so when we arrived at the gate, the cashier suggested we paid 51,000 FRS CFA. My group contributed 20,000 FRS CFA and others 31,000 FRS CFA. A waitress accompanied us inside and indicated a place for us to sit. Then she rushed to the bar to get us two bottles of Scotch whisky, together with three plastic bottles of coca cola and two bottles of soda. Inside the club, the decorations included visual lighting and special sounds, all in flamboyant style to create an incredible nightlife experience for customers. Waitresses were very occupied serving liquor and soft drinks. At one far end, a DJ was busy in his booth playing electric, R&B, disco, Ivoirian/Congolese and Cameroonian music, while dancers converged at the center to perform a floorshow.

It was time now to focus on dancing behaviors that lead to the exchange of phone numbers, so we held an eye on the dance floor. Men danced with women and in some cases we realized dancing had gone beyond mere gestures to bodily pleasure. Since the blaring

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<sup>27</sup> Katios nightclub is co-owned by two Cameroonian popular soccer players, Samuel Eto'o and Geremi Fotso Njitap. Djeuga nightclub is the dancing section of Djeuga Hotel in downtown Yaoundé.

<sup>28</sup> According to the XE online currency converter (see [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com)), 1 euro is equal to 655.957 FRS CFA Cameroon local currency. However, exchange rate fluctuates each time according to the international market situations.

music did not allow us to exchange ideas as we had done in Green Valley Bar, we all played the role of V4, that is we all observed and took note of the non-verbal cues as dancing went on. Whenever we noticed a pair of dancers whose dancing style was going to lift to sexual pleasure, we would focus on their eye gazes to capture the point where they would exchange mobile phone numbers to initiate a sexual relationship.

We were also determined to discern other aspects of mobile phone behaviors during dancing. For instance, a few people were carrying two mobile phones and claimed one is connected to the MTN provider, and the other to Orange. I told my research assistants to take note of those carrying two phones and if possible interact with them in order to find out their reason for doing so. To accomplish this, we dispersed in different directions. I danced near a man who was carrying two phones and jokingly asked him “Bro you have two good phones and you take them into a nightclub?” He smiled and told me: “I have a reason for that.” We asked this question to several dancers and discovered there were two motives for carrying two phones: (1) to display the devices as status symbols and (2) to use them for managing two or more sexual relationships. Researchers elsewhere have begun to identify the role mobile phone use plays in men’s extramarital sexual activities. For instance, Archambault (2009), in her anthropological fieldwork on mobile phone use in Mozambique, reveals that the interception of a suspicious call or message, just like encountering a disconnected phone, usually triggers a heady argument between spouses. To prevent this situation, it comes in handy to also carry a “secret” phone. In the same way, in Katios and Djeuga nightclubs, men disconnected one mobile phone (for example the one with the MTN number) and used the other (with the Orange number) when they were with a woman say A and vice versa when with a woman B, depending on which mobile phone provider she uses.

On Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2010, we continued our participant observation at the second nightclub, the Djeuga nightclub. At 9pm we boarded a taxi from Bonas to *carrefour Wada*, a street adjacent to Djeuga Hotel <sup>29</sup>. It was about two minutes’ walk from that street to the entrance of the nightclub. We waited a while at the entrance to decide if it would be necessary to pay the entire entrance fee. Entry into Djeuga, especially as we did not succeed to join a group as we had done in Katios the previous day, was going to be very expensive, that is about 80,000 FRS CFA. Thus, we decided to wait outside and observe tacit aspects of sexual risk behaviors through mediated-communication among nightclub goers. As they

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<sup>29</sup> Carrefour Wada or roundabout Wada is a crossroad, one road leads to Djinga, and another to Longkack neighborhood.

arrived from taxi to taxi, we watched their communication patterns texting, calling and answering, and the role these played in socializing within their night-worlds. For example, a group of three girls came out of taxi and moved towards my direction and one of them (coded Gla) picked up her phone as it rang and started nagging (excerpt of her conversation in Chapter 5, section 5.1.2.). As Gla's friends were waiting for waiting, her phone rang once more. From her answers during this phone conversation, I could imagine the men they were waiting for were now around and are looking for a place to park their car. After a while, two men in their late forties appeared and went towards the girls. One of the men (coded Dan) apologized to the girl when he and his friend arrived. These girls were in their early twenties and the age disparity between them and the men was about twenty years.

In a bid to discern patterns of mediated communication among another group, colleague C4 asked them some questions. The first informal question he asked (jokingly) was:

Is it allowed to carry and use devices like mobile phones inside this nightclub? The answer by one of the "nightclub goer" is presented in Chapter 5. At this level, we thought of moving to another method, notably the restaurants visit method.

#### **2.4.6.4. Case study 3: Observations in restaurants at Melen, Obili and Bonas**

Before going into detail about data collection in restaurants, I want to highlight the relevance of restaurant behavior in our field research. Apart from traditional research on food as a sub discipline in anthropology, anthropologists have stressed how the inability to feed the family has contributed, in part, to socio-economic factors enhancing HIV transmission in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, Singer and Erickson (2013:71) point to “hidden hunger” caused by gender-based inequalities in access to food for insecurity in many societies, including sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, Mintz and DuBois (2002) claim that food studies have contributed to research techniques meant to discover informants’ behavior. Accordingly, I conducted research in restaurants in order to collect data on sexuality when young people interact or socialize to eat.

The first restaurant we visited is Grassland Resto (we coded it as RES G), located between the neighborhoods EMIA and Melen<sup>30</sup>. This restaurant is quite famous in the

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<sup>30</sup> EMIA stands for *École Militaire Inter-Armes* or National Military Academy, and the entire neighborhood around its premises is known as EMIA.

periphery of Yaoundé 1 University, as it serves the typical traditional menu known as *kontry chop*<sup>31</sup>. Rice and spaghetti and such, which are considered exotic recipes, are not offered in Grassland Resto. Instead, it has typical items on its menu as *achu*, *water fufu* with *eru* or with *ndole*, *okro* with *garri*, and *fufu corn* with *njamajama*<sup>32</sup>. We ordered *fufu* and *eru*, the dish which the majority of the people were eating.

As customers enjoyed their meals, colleague C4 was busy noting sexually-suggestive attitudes expressed in mediate ways. Calling someone on the phone or sending someone a text message to meet at RES G, we noticed, contained expressions to initiate a sexual relation with another person. Another characteristic we noticed were the “selective airtime conversations.” By selective airtime conversation, I mean that those who received calls or texts messages selected which call to accept or which text message to respond to. For instance, a female client had just started to eat her dish of *water fufu* and *eru*, when her phone rang, and she simply stared at the incoming number and decided not to pick up. We noticed men and women alike who received calls but refused to answer. At many tables in the restaurant, men and women alike received text messages, just stared at them and sometimes sighed. We observed these selective phone behaviors keenly as they seemed to be full with sexual meanings especially attitudes in relation to managing several sexual relationships. We watched men, who, after receiving two or three text messages and several ignored calls, even decided to switch off the phone. We also observed arguments, for example, a woman’s mother calling her to see where she was or a man’s wife texting him about the argument they had that morning. The impressions of these suspicious attitudes will be fully interpreted in chapter 5.

After the RES G observation, we took a taxi to the neighborhood Obili where there are many small restaurants too. In these restaurants, we continued to use the curiosity technique to discover sexually-suggestive attitudes relating to mobile phone use, just as we had done at Grassland Resto. After Obili, my three colleagues told me they were going to travel home the coming week to join their families for Christmas. I thought it was time for me

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<sup>31</sup> *Kontry* refers to local, meaning what is locally produced.

<sup>32</sup> *Achu* has become a nationwide recipe in Cameroon, but originates from the North West province. It is pounded fufu that can be eaten with a type of yellow soup. *Eru* is a dish prepared with the leaves of *Gnetum Africanum* with fresh pepper, onions, dry meat, crayfish, palm oil, water leaves, and served with *water fufu*, which is fermented cassava paste. *Ndole* are bitter leaves (*Vernonia Amydalina*) prepared with fresh pilled grinded peanuts, ginger, dry fish, fresh meat or fish and onions. *Okro* is a dish of leaves of *Hibiscus Escule* prepared with pumpkin seeds or groundnuts. *Garri* is cassava flour prepared by stirring in hot water, and finally *njamajama* is a dish made of huckleberry leaves prepared with fresh pepper and palm oil.



to also meet my family in Buea for Christmas. Hence, data collection was temporarily suspended until January 2011.

So on December 15<sup>th</sup>, I travelled to Buea to meet my family and enjoy the Christmas celebrations. While in Buea, I thought it was an opportunity for me as a researcher to still carry out research, especially on behaviors similar to those of young people in Yaoundé. Moreover, I had read Mokake's (2009) document on the teenage girls of the Molyko neighborhood in Buea and their mobile phone use. Molyko is the site where Buea University is located, and students' social activities in this neighborhood are similar to those in Bonas in Yaoundé. Consequently, observation during the Christmas holidays in Buea, I thought, would enhance my understanding of student sexual behavior and mobile phone use among Cameroonian youth. As I was living in a small neighborhood called Bonduma about 2 kilometers away, I would always just walk to meet friends at Molyko. There are interesting places to drink and socialize such as Etta Palace, Happicam, Harelglena, and Paramount, which became my physical scenes to study mobile phone usage and sexual risk behaviors. Throughout my vacation in Buea, I gathered vital information that would support my hypothesis during my subsequent research in Yaoundé. In particular, I related the acquisition and use of a mobile phone as well as its meaning to various the theoretical sources that I kept reading. In Buea, I had the opportunity to confirm the following:

- a) That in Buea, mobile phones are becoming a feature of mainstream culture, yet, according to Salzman, Palen and Young (2000), local phone users do not understand their effects on communicative practices and behavior.
- b) That mobile phones, according to Campbell and Kelly (2006), strengthen ties in social networks.
- c) Besides, I found out specific risk behaviors such as deleting one's text messages from one sexual partner when he/she is with another sexual partner.

On Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 2011, I left Buea for Yaoundé. The journey takes four hours, one hour from Buea to Douala and three hours from Douala to Yaoundé. When I arrived in Yaoundé, the first thing I did was to call my colleagues. Colleagues C4 and C3 had come back the day before but colleague C2 had not, he promised to come on Friday. The next day, C4, C3 and I went to Yaoundé 2 University to see if we could start fieldwork, unfortunately we met only a few students who, on top of that, claimed to be too busy because they had just returned from holidays. We returned to Yaoundé and waited until Friday when

C2 was expected to return. The latter did arrive on Friday, but we decided to wait a few days anyway before going back to Yaoundé 2 University, to allow students to settle in after their vacations. So the following week, on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> 2011, we went to Yaoundé 2 University. There were many students on campus and just like had been the case in Yaoundé 1, they moved around the lobbies where we administered questionnaires to those who opted to participate. On Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2011 we made the last trip to Yaoundé 2 University and ended up with a totality of 75 filled out questionnaires. By now, we had gathered sufficient data from university students both at Yaoundé 1 and Yaoundé 2 University. Therefore, it was time to focus on the high schools, applying a new method, the focus group discussion (FGDs) method, as we had previously decided not to use questionnaires at these sites.

#### ***2.4.2.7. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and interviews at high schools***

On February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011 we started focus group discussions and informal interviews in high schools. In total, we interviewed 84 participants (high school students and staff). In each school, 12 participants came from the lower sixth class and 12 from the upper sixth class, making a total of 24 participants in each high school. We also interviewed 4 staff members in each school making 12 staffs in three schools. Below is a diagram that displays the structure of participants in the three high schools. The participants were coded by colleague C4 for purposes of smooth analysis. The FGDs were conducted orally, face-to-face and written out in real time by the interviewers (C1, C2, C3 and C4) which permitted direct monitoring. The discussions took place at convenient locations (the high school soccer field at *Lycée de Mendong*, shades under trees at *Lycée de d'Efoulan* and in classrooms at LBA) and each session lasted between 30 minutes to 45 minutes.

<b>School</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>No. of partticipants (students)</b>	<b>No. of paticipants (staff)</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Lycée de Mendong</i>	Lower sixth	12	2	14
<i>Lycée de Mendong</i>	Upper sixth	12	2	14
<i>Lycée d'Efoulan</i>	Lower sixth	12	2	14
<i>Lycée d'Efoulan</i>	Upper sixth	12	2	14
LBA	Lower sixth	12	2	14
LBA	Upper sixth	12	2	14
		<b>72</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>84</b>

**Table 5: Participants composition during FGDs in Yaoundé**

Source: Fieldwork notes (2010)

In terms of participants' demographic background, first, we considered age, and the respondents' age was between 15 – 18 years. We concentrated on this age group following Marston and King's (2006) finding that half of new HIV infections worldwide occur among young people aged 15–24 years. The high school students comprise exactly this age group and this pushed our inquiry to investigate the unique ways of HIV transmission found among the youngsters concerned. These students, merely by using their phones, are “subject to variations in ways humans interact and behave” (Rhodes 2008:209) which at times triggers risky sexual behavior. Secondly, we took gender equality into account and chose 6 girls and 6 boys in each class of the three high schools in order to achieve a participation that was representative.

Next, in terms of access to high schools students, as I mentioned in section 2.4.3.1., the problems encountered section, meeting them was not as easy as meeting university students. Access to them was only possible during their short breaks of 15 minutes or during

their long break of 30 minutes, and both time spans did not provide enough room to conveniently collect significant data. On top of that, during these breaks, the majority of students preferred to get something to eat or to hang around with their friends. Thus, we decided to wait after school to have discussions with those very students who were willing to participate and not in a hurry to go home.

The questions of the questionnaires with read aloud during the FGDs, were the same at every high school. They were as follows:

- 1) One of the popular social network services for youths nowadays is the mobile phone, do you have one? (A) YES (B) NO
- 2) How many people are linked to your mobile phone as members of your social network service? (A) 0 = 10 (B) 11 = 20 (C) 21 = 30 (D) More than 30
- 3) Offering you a complex and recent mobile phone can influence your attitude towards someone who is trying to have a relation with you (A) True (B) False (C) Other (mention).....
- 4) Among the sms you receive per day, how many express romantic feelings? (A) The majority (B) About fifty fifty (C) The minority (D) Rarely if ever
- 5) Do you also receive calls from those who want a sexual relationship with you (A) Often (B) Sometimes (C) Always
- 6) Do you have a steady sexual partner?
- 7) Do you also have a non-steady sexual partner(s)?
- 8) Do you communicate with sexual partners about the use of condoms?
- 9) Do you receive material support from people who solicit a sexual relation from you?

We used these key questions at the outset to obtain systematic information concerning participants' adoption and use of mobile phones, including its meaning in everyday life. Note that we nonetheless improvised additional questions, depending on the participants' answers and interpretations. As such, these improvised questions were different at each high school.

In the following sections, I present the code names of the respondents of *Lycée de Mendong*, *Lycée Bilingue d'Application* and *Lycée d'Efoulan* respectively, and outline the improvised questions that were asked. The totality of the responses can be found in the annex section, that is after the bibliography. All results will be analyzed in Chapter 6.

As I have mentioned in the ethics section 2.4.3., the aim of coding participants was to comply ethical requirements, but an additional reason was that coded data are more easy to manage and analyze afterwards. For example, in case I analyze the data from self-report by a female in lower sixth class, I simply refer to her code, which is very convenient to locate the wanted information in our field notes.

#### **2.4.2.7.1. Lycée de Mendong**

The participants' codes were as follows:

*For Lower Sixth Class:*

Females: MLA (f), MLE (f), MLI (f) MLO (f), MLU (f), and MLY (f) = 6 females

Males: MLA (m), MLE (m), MLI (m), MLO (m), MLU (m), and MLY (m) = 6 males

*For Upper Sixth Class:*

Females: MUA (f), MUE (f), MUI (f) MUO (f), MUU (f), and MUY (f) = 6 females

Males: MUA (m), MUE (m), MUI (m), MUO (m), MUU (m), and MUY (m) = 6 males

We improvised the following questions:

- How do you manage texting or calling your steady sexual partner and other sexual partners at the same time?

- Do you have different names for different sexual partners?

#### **2.4.2.7.2. Lycée Bilingue d'Application (LBA)**

The participants' codes were as follows:

*For Lower Sixth Class:*

Females: LLA (f), LLE (f), LLI (f) LLO (f), LLU (f), and LLY (f)

Males: LLA (m), LLE (m), LLI (m), LLO (m), LLU (m), and LLY (m)

*For Upper Sixth Class:*

Females: LUA (f), LUE (f), LUI (f) LUO (f), LUU (f), and LUY (f)

At LBA, our improvised questions were inspired by the social proximity of LBA campus to the public world, that is near to several ministerial buildings. As a result of this proximity, there are frequent interactions between LBA students and sex-seeking individuals (*mbomas*) who are employed at these ministries. Additionally, LBA is very close to downtown Yaoundé

where the *mbomas* go to shop. The location of LBA appeared to trigger a whole range of activities that were not spontaneously mentioned by the students of the other high schools.

*Examples of questions improvised at LBA*

- 1) Do you often encounter sex-seeking people who work in the ministries?
- 2) Do you often encounter sex-seeking who shop in downtown Yaoundé?
- 3) What can you say about your experiences with those mentioned in 1) and 2) concerning their behaviors to ask mobile phone numbers from you?
- 4) What can you say about your experiences with those mentioned in 1) and 2) concerning their behaviors to propose a ride (using their cars)?

**2.4.2.7.3. Lycée d'Efoulan**

The participants' codes were as follows:

*For Lower Sixth Class:*

Females: ELA (f), ELE (f), ELI (f) ELO (f), ELU (f), and ELY (f)

Males: ELA (m), ELE (m), ELI (m), ELO (m), ELU (m), and ELY (m)

*For Upper Sixth Class:*

Females: EUA (f), EUE (f), EUI (f) EUO (f), EUU (f), and EUY (f)

Males: EUA (m), EUE (m), EUI (m), EUO (m), EUU (m), and EUY (m)

At *Lycée d'Efoulan*, the participants' answers to the questions of the questionnaire inspired us to improvise questions concerning Valentine's day and safari trips, topics they had brought up spontaneously. Answers to these questions revealed a whole range of gifts to us, different from the usual airtime credits or sophisticated mobile phones.

*Examples of questions improvised at Lycée d'Efoulan*

- 1) Some of you mentioned about leisure or safari trips with sex-seeking partners while you were answering main questions about mobile phones and sex, can you tell me the type of people who take you to such trips?

- 2) Can you tell me exactly where they take you to?
- 3) How do you interact with such partners on mobile phones immediately before, during and after such trips

### **Closing remarks (Phase 1)**

After the last focus group discussion at *Lycée de d'Efoulan* was rounded up, on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2011, this also meant the end of Phase 1, and the provisional end of data the collection at the high schools of Yaoundé. The data collection at these high schools was resumed in Phase 3, with the interviews of its staff members. In between, I left Yaoundé for Ghent, on 26 February 2011, to start Phase 2 of my fieldwork, which I outline in the following section.

#### ***2.4.2.8. Data collection through questionnaires at Ghent University (Phase 2)***

I began fieldwork in Ghent on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2011 and ended it on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2011. Ghent is one of the main cities of Belgium and it is located in the Flemish region (called “Flanders” in English), more specifically in the province of East Flanders (or “*Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen*” in Dutch, the local language). I had no research assistant(s), yet, access to respondents was quite easy because (1) I was living in one of the student buildings which were also my research sites and (2) the distance between the three sites could be easily covered by bike. The sites were Home Vermeulen, Home Fabiola and Home Boudewijn.

The aim of the fieldwork in Ghent was to investigate specific local and cultural features that would illuminate distinctive risk behaviors among youths through mobile phone usage in the two completely different cultural settings, Yaoundé and Ghent.

##### **2.4.2.8.1. Data collection method in Ghent**

The first step towards data collection was to request a building plan of the three sites from the Facilities Management department of University of Ghent. After I received (via email) PDF copies of the building plan of the three buildings, I used questionnaires to start the survey at Home Fabiola. When I arrived at the building, I followed the building plan which showed Home Fabiola had eight floors. At the basement, there is a study room with a TV (leisure) room on the opposite side. To go the other floors, one can choose to climb the stairs or take the elevator. It was 7pm when I arrived at the first floor and I discreetly knocked at each

door. Out of about 12 doors that I knocked at, only one girl opened the door to her room. I greeted her and went on to tell her that I was conducting research in student buildings, thus, I would be grateful if she could devote about 10 minutes to answer my questionnaire. She said okay but then asked me to wait in the kitchen where she would bring the filled in questionnaire. I walked the hallway right to the kitchen and waited for the questionnaire.

In the same way, I knocked from door to door till the 8<sup>th</sup> floor. Within one week, I had collected about 25 completed questionnaires at Home Fabiola. The following week, I started a survey at Home Boudewijn. Home Boudewijn has the highest number of rooms and thus accommodates most students. The building has 14 floors whereas Home Fabiola and Home Vermeyleen have only 8 floors. Home Boudewijn is located opposite the University of Ghent hospital, about 3km from Home Fabiola and Home Vermeyleen. At Home Boudewijn, just as at Home Fabiola, it was not possible to carry out a survey in the morning because many students would have left for classes and they hardly ever came to their rooms during their breaks at noon, the typical lunchtime. Therefore, the best time to get students to participate, was in the evenings from 6pm onwards. Excluded days were Tuesdays, Thursdays and weekends (Friday evening until Sunday). Indeed, as Tuesdays and Thursdays were customary party days for the students of Ghent University, they went, immediately after classes, to their usual party spot called *Overpoort*<sup>33</sup>. As a result, on Wednesday and Fridays most students claimed their hang-overs made it difficult to participate in my inquiries. Moreover, on Friday evenings the majority of the students went home for the weekend and they only returned on Sundays. Thus, I went to Home Boudewijn only on Mondays and Wednesdays. It took me about nine days to complete 30 filled questionnaires, more than what I had collected at Home Fabiola.

I still had one week left before the end of November, thus, I moved to Home Vermeyleen to finish the last survey. I followed the same procedure, arriving at 7pm, using stairs, knocking at doors and waiting in the kitchen to receive the completed questionnaires, 25 in total. After the survey at Home Vermeyleen, I had few days left since I had to return to Yaoundé on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2011. All in all, I had collected 80 questionnaires at the Homes Vermeyleen, Boudewijn and Fabiola.

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<sup>33</sup> Famous for pubs and dancing clubs such as Decadence, including several pizza huts, kebabs and soup restaurants.



#### ***2.4.2.9. Data collection through ethnographic fieldwork (Phase 3)***

The third and final phase of my field study took place in Cameroon and started on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 and lasted until January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012. During this phase, I was particularly interested to unearth the social pathways which, based on adult opinions concerning youth and mobile phones, might link mobile phone usage to health. I thought that since mobile phones had only been deeply integrated into the daily lives of young people in Yaoundé since the last thirteen years (from 2000 to 2013), specific responses from parents and educators might be insightful as they witnessed the changes that occurred since the introduction of the mobile phone, and I was keen to learn about their experiences of the pre-mobile phone era. I paid particular attention to the opinions of educators, more specifically the university staff. I interviewed 2 staff members from each faculty of the two universities, inquiring about their thoughts on the link between mobile phone usage and risky sexual behavior, and whether they suspected this link could trigger new patterns of HIV transmission. Yaoundé 1 University comprises four faculties, Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences (FALSH), Faculty of Science (FS), Faculty of Biomedical Sciences (FSBM) and Higher Teachers Training College (ENS)<sup>34</sup>. So in total, I interviewed 8 staff members of these four faculties of Yaoundé 1 University. In addition, there were 4 staff members from the two faculties at Yaoundé 2 University, the Faculty of Law and Political Science (FSPJ) and the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences (FESG)<sup>35</sup>. As a result, the total number of interviewed staff of both universities, added up to 12. Each of these interviews took place after an appointment was made. In other words, I would usually go to the faculty secretariat and present the same authorizations I had previously collected during the 2010 fieldwork, stating that I wished to interview staff members concerning mobile phone usage and risky sexual behavior. Consequently, a date would be scheduled for me to meet the 2 staff members of the faculty concerned.

In addition, I interviewed a few parents and MTN and Orange airtime credit resellers. Interviews with the latter, known as “call box owners,” revealed further detail on the link between airtime credit transfers (as a gift) and sexual activity. Furthermore, I discovered the relevance of the famous MTN 1 hour free airtime credit to encourage romantic relationships among young people. Although I limit my attention to call box owners of MTN and Orange, note that since recently, a third mobile phone company, Set'Mobile, is underway

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<sup>34</sup> FALSH stands for *Faculté des Arts, Lettres et Sciences Humaine*, FSBM stands for *Faculté des Sciences Biomédicale* or *Centre Universitaire des Sciences de la Santé*.

<sup>35</sup> FSPJ stands for *Faculté des Sciences Politique et Juridique*, and FESG stands for *Faculté d'Economie et Sciences des Gestions*.

to join the mobile phone business in Cameroon. Set'Mobile is owned by the soccer star Samuel Eto'o.

## **Chapter 3: Theoretical framework**

A theoretical framework contributes to explain, describe and explore the approaches to and the results of my data in a profound way. In this chapter, I present the models, paradigms and worldviews that help to grasp how mobile phone usage and HIV risk behaviors are related. To Glanz et al. (2008:26) theory is a thoughtful abstract or generalized thinking (contemplation or speculation) and it is framed in a “set of interrelated concepts, definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of events or situations.”

Following Glanz et al. (2008), I use a series of models and worldviews which I consider useful to explore, describe and explain how new communication technologies, especially mobile phone usage, facilitates sexual activities among young people in Yaoundé. I relate two broad theoretical frameworks to the three main research themes of this study, that is, Mobile Phone As Social Network Service (coded as MPASNS), Friendship Mapping (coded as FM) and Youth Culture Survey (coded as YCS). The two broad theoretical frameworks are the network theory and the culture theory. Under each of these theories, I present sub-theories on the emergence of new communication technology, especially mobile phone usage, and how it relates to HIV risk behaviors.

(A) Network theory = relates to mobile phone as social network service (MPASNS) and friendship mapping (FM) as thematic questions meant to broaden the understanding of the social connectivity through mobile phone usage and HIV risk behaviors involved.

(B) Culture theory = relates to youth culture survey (YCS) and Friendship mapping (FM) and enhances the development of new social pathways meant to probe into hidden patterns of HIV transmission through mobile phone usage and risk behaviors from youth culture.

### **3.1. Network theory**

Network theory, which today has implicit applicability within different disciplines such as biology, economics, sociology, epidemiology and anthropology, initially concerned applied mathematics exclusively (computer science, network science and graph science). Social network analysis considers social relationships through nodes (individuals) and ties

(friendship, kinship, organizational position, sexual relationships and such). This approach has been quite important in research that focuses on risk taking by adolescents through the internet (Fogel and Nehmad 2009). Mobile phones by now have entered the study of social networks, and researchers revealed how these devices can be detrimental for health but profitable for crime (Licoppe and Smoreda 2005). Social network analysis allows to frame the future of social connectivity and sexuality in the research context of this study, Yaoundé's youth.

### **3.1.1. Social network analysis conceptual framework**

Some social science researchers apply network theory to explain the spread of infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, and this sub-theory is known as social network analysis. More particularly, they use this concept to explore the role of mobile phones in creating and maintaining sexual networks susceptible to risk behavior. In fact, renowned health institutes, such as the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the National Institute of Mental Health and the Center for Disease Control (CDC), offer social scientists substantial funding for projects investigating the impact of mobile phones on sexual risk behaviors. For example, the research team of the Yale Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS (CIRA) led by Trace Kershaw employs the social network approach through what they call "social technologies," to monitor the flow of information among dozens of people and found out how information flow influences the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Through the social network analysis conceptual framework, this team emphasizes the importance of mediated communication in determining the social and sexual behaviors of those connected (CIRA eBulletin, 2013).

Rice and co-workers (USC Social Work, 2013) of the University of South Carolina have been conducting a project funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to investigate patterns of sexual risk behaviors, and their research was based upon the conceptual framework of social network too. They investigated risk behavior related to mobile phone use, one of their recent surveys – effectuated in 2012 among 1839 students in Los Angeles – led to a publication on sexting. The study put forward that sexting induces a cluster of risky sexual behaviors among adolescents, and that consequently the topic should be included in health-related courses at school and in STDs' prevention programs. They theorized that communication technology peer intervention (meant to reduce mediated-communication risk behaviors) could be designed with a focus on communication flows and

how it relates to network characteristics and sexual risk within networks. Health-related projects such as those described above confirm the need for research which focuses on social connectivity and sexual risk practices. This is precisely the gap that my study aims to fill in, set in the research context of Yaoundé.

Still through the social network conceptual framework, Eagle and co-workers (2009) presented a paper published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science (PNAS 2009), entitled *Inferring friendship network structure by using mobile phone data*. This paper proposed an approach similar to the one used by Kershaw and co-workers specifically on the possibility of mapping and understanding sexual risk behavior patterns through sexual partner and friendship matrices. A similar paper by Onnela and co-workers was published in an edition of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science (PNAS 2006). The paper is entitled *Structure and tie strengths in mobile communication networks* and outlines an emerging scientific model through which mobile phones and e-mail logs can provide detailed records of human communication patterns, thus offering novel avenues to assess the structure of social and communication networks.

Social network analysis is relevant in other ways for HIV intervention research too, and once again, my study focus on these alternative models by examining how text messages facilitate sexual encounters – and the ensuing sexual risk behavior – which otherwise would have been avoided. Up until today however, researchers have done the opposite, paying attention to text messages as a means of social networking to *improve* health care. This model, which is called e-health, is based on the potential that a social network which is set up through text messages has to induce behavior change. Many researchers have hypothesized that since mobile phone usage has become part of our daily lives, it has the potential to improve health through behavior modification. Kaplan (2006) investigated whether in developing countries mobile phones have the capacity to deliver healthcare information. He found out that health intervention through text messages may indeed be useful, but at the same time he foresees some shortcoming of this model. The shortcoming, according to Kaplan, is that message delivery may lead to an increased stigmatization of HIV patients if they use shared phones and their status is spread among others. Another positive use of mobile phone in matters of health, is that a social network model based upon text messages might frame new forms of committed (intimate) relationships which are less risky. This

approach might change the current norms for young people to practice multi-sexual relationships.

On the other hand, text messaging appears to have a negative effect on relations as well, as my study results also show while referring to the suspicion that the messages may arouse. As such, the impact of text messages challenges former ways of attachment in romantic relationships, both between youth and between adults, as they interfere with the relationship satisfaction among couples, including young non-marital sexual partners. In the next section, I present explanatory approaches, especially those from social historians and sociologists whose findings on the emergence of new communication technology emphasize its social impact on society.

### **3.1.2. The social impact worldview from mobile phone network analysis**

Sociologists and social historians use the social network analysis conceptual framework to focus on the social impact the adaption of mobile telephony has on a society. The social impact worldview was initially applied by psychologists to predict the levels of impact that a specific situation creates. As for this study, the specific situation is the emergence of mobile phone use in youth culture, an emergence which came with certain levels of impact that were not previously experienced in Cameroon, particularly what concerns sexual flirtation.

Prominent researchers used this model to assess the everyday impact of social networking (connectedness) through the use of mobile phones, stressing that telephone technology has the capacity to change culture and society. Katz (2005) claims that the emergence of a new communication technology, especially mobile phones, affects not only people's individual lives, but also their relationships with others. Rich Ling, in his study entitled *Mobile connection: The cell phone's impact on society* (2007) which elaborates on the social networking model too, by stresses the impact of mobile telephones on other aspects of everyday life, such as security, social support and social control. Castells et al. (2007) explore mobile phone's social impact as well, and claim that researchers are compelled to do so inasmuch as mobile communication is by now at the center of human activity. As for the positive side of mobile phone usage, The authors highlight the positive impact of mobile phones, since they enable to enhance security, strengthen social support among families, and increase business relations between business partners, especially in 20<sup>th</sup> century sub-Saharan Africa.

Donner (2008) stresses that scholars show a growing interest in assessing both the positive and the negative social impact through the impact-adoption axis of mobile phone usage. The researchers whose interest was stirred include, according to Donner, (a) those impressed by the function of market mechanisms underpinning the stunning spread of a new technology across the planet, (b) those concerned with the economic development who see the mobile as an enabler of broad-based prosperity and finally (c) those concerned with describing the social and cultural implications of its use. To the latter group belong Lim and Hellard (2007), Tomnay and co-workers (2005) and Mukund and Murray (2010) who all have contributed literature that relates text messaging to sexual health services, such as partner notification and contact tracing. Perttiera (2005) discusses how mobile phones affect notions of identity and trigger the rise of the sexual subject. In her study on sexual exploitation, Hughes (2002) explores commercial sex acts as prostitution, pornography and live sex shows, and reveals how women and children are stalked and trafficked through the use of mobile technology. Finally, the internet is well-known for its capacity to proliferate child pornography and to provide opportunities for pedophiles. The above studies contribute in the diverse questions and perspectives that motivates my interest in studying the impact of mobile phone use on sexuality in Yaoundé.

Gerard Goggin's (2008) social impact approach opens with a statement that signals the dialectic move of human civilization to the current culture tinged with wireless usage, that is, internet and mobile phones.<sup>36</sup> He analyzes the impact of daily mediated connectivity through mobile phones and warns against its cultural implications. Indeed, Goggin (2008), as well as Thompson (1998), considers mobile phones as modernity's devices that stir up moral panics.

Moral panics are social fears arising from the impact of what critically modernist anthropologists as Appadurai (1990) call "indigenization." To Cameroonians, mobile phones are features coming from the outside which they adopt and domesticate, a process that cultural anthropologists frame as indigenization. As such, mobile phone usage has been indigenized in Yaoundé mainstream culture. That mobile phone usage is now at the center of human activity is stated by Castells and co-workers (2007:1) in their study *Our networks, our lives*. Yet, as the authors add, the social impact of this mediated-communication triggers a wide-range of fundamental problems, as it comes with a new sets of values brought along by

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<sup>36</sup> Extensions of Durkheim's dialectics on the breakdown of social order in his *anomie*.

the novel ways of putting up ties, which in turn might provoke sexual risk practices. This theoretical frame inspires my research questions on the causal relationship between the young people of Yaoundé and their sexual risk behaviors since the appearance of the mobile phone.

While Castells, Katz, Ling and Goggin have chiefly focused on the social effect of mediated communication from a more global stance, I will now cite specific research on its impact in sub-Saharan Africa. Kibora and Hahn (2008) highlight the replacement of what they call “oral society” by ICT society in Burkina. From the Burkina local and cultural barometer, the authors warn that the penetration of mobile phone usage will lead to economic problems, and also to an alteration of the existing social relations. Nyamnjoh and his co-workers (2009) too, refer to the new social networking devices as “the new talking drums in Africa,” as such using Kibora and Hahn’s (2008) lens to outline the replacement of oral society. Both Kibora and Hahn and Nyamnjoh and co-workers consider the replacement of oral society by ICT as the alteration of social order in society. These forms of changes were found out during my participant observation, as I will outline in detail in chapter 5, more precisely in the results section. In particular, my ethnographic data show that a quick look at mobile phone usage in the streets in Yaoundé suffices to indicate that text messages and phone calls have replaced former forms of social interaction among families, friends and sexual partners. Therefore, my study’s contribution consists in analyzing, through the social network paradigm, the changed ways of interaction and how they have brought about sexual flirtation with sexual transactional elements (gifting).

### **3.1.3. Anthropological concept to social network**

Despite the fact that the development of social network analysis is “often associated with sociology, especially with the formal sociology of German sociologist Simmel” (Carrington and Scott, 2011), it has been very crucial in the anthropological understanding of behavior in large-scale complex societies (Mitchell, 1974). Some of the anthropologists credited as founders of social network analysis in anthropology are Bronislaw Malinowski, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Specific aspects of their contributions to the network model comprise ethnographic accounts of social groups (kinship). In particular Malinowski’s *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* (1929), and Radcliffe-Brown’s *Social Organization of Australian Tribes* (1931) laid the foundations for social network theory in anthropology. The principles of human behavior from the anthropological concept of kinship relations in Melanesia and Trobriand Islands, as revealed by Malinowski



and Radcliffe-Brown, can be applied to make sense of Yaoundé's social relations, especially of mobile phone usage and how it relates to sexuality.

Another inspiring example of an ethnographic account based upon the network approach is Malinowski's account *Kula; the Circulating Exchange of Valuables in the Archipelagoes of Eastern New Guinea* (1920) in which he describes the Kula trading network that exchanges bracelets and necklaces across the Trobriand Islands. These trading routes or networks as described by Malinowski (in the same way that his mentor, Dr. Seligman<sup>37</sup>, did) give an example of social interaction (by natives) through commodity exchange. Malinowski's social relations account includes a network of natives between the islands at the eastern end of Guinea, that is Lousiades, Woodlark, Loughlans, Trobriands and Entracastreaux (Malinowski, 1920). Through this network account, Malinowski portrays a picture of the *kula* as a key value system among Melanesians. From this network perspective, Malinowski's description of trade routes (that is, circles signifying Kula communities) represents nodes and edges linking individuals in social networks. The exchange of bracelets and necklaces in this social network of Trobriand natives is inspiring for my study on the gifting practices between young sexual partners in Yaoundé, and their connectedness as expressed through their mobile phone profiles.

Unlike Malinowski who displays social interaction through commodity exchange, Radcliffe-Brown expands anthropological network theory by applying the social interaction model to initiation rites among local Australians. Radcliffe-Brown's model of social entities begins with the local groups, which are divided into hordes, and each horde (a territory) is called a "*nurumba*." During initiation ceremonies, young people from various hordes meet together and distinguish themselves by saying the names of places of their *nurumba*. Therefore, what links these young people as social entities together, are the age-old customary initiation ceremonies. During these ceremonies, values and norms – for example totemic backgrounds and languages – are shared. Radcliffe-Brown's conceptual model, especially on the social interaction to initiation rites among the local Australians, contributes to the understanding of the social interaction as we have observed it during mediated-communication practices in youth culture in Yaoundé. Furthermore, Africanist-anthropologists, as for instance Robert Thornton, have made specific anthropological contribution to HIV/AIDS research through network analysis. In his seminal book entitled

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<sup>37</sup> British physician and anthropologist who mentored Bronislaw Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard.

*Unimagined community: sex, networks and AIDS in Uganda and South Africa* (2008), Thornton lays emphasis on the importance of (yet a neglected) sexual network inquiry as a holistic approach to HIV prevalence in Uganda and South Africa. He regrets that such an approach is neglected, and that while we have some data on sexual behavior in other African countries, specific data on the details of sexual networks is lacking. He goes further to mention that sexual networks are invisible or unimagined because neither to those who participate in them, as much to those who study, these networks show a clear representation of the size and patterns. In this dissertation, I use such theoretical arguments from Thornton's network invisibility approach to illuminate how patterns of sexual risk behaviors in youth culture are invisible and unimagined to both the youth themselves and to social science researchers on HIV/AIDS in Yaoundé. Researchers like Ellison and Boyd (2008) have equally acknowledged invisible and unimagined patterns in sexual network by studying and documenting sexual relationship initiation and predation by strangers. In the same way, I associated Ellison's approach of sexual relationships and predation by strangers to new courtship practices in Yaoundé where sex-seeking individuals solicit the mobile phone numbers from those they did not know formerly, but intend to have sex with in the (near) future.

Thornton (2008), however, admits that sexual networks are broad subsets of friendship and supersets of kinship networks, but the fact that they are neither institutions nor social structures suggests their complexities and narrowness in social science research. His sexual network conceptual model informs my study on the patterns of sexual networks, which are hidden or unimagined. In other words, mobile phone usage, particularly the sexting that researchers as Rice and co-workers (2012) see as a cluster of risky sexual behavior, is an example of up-to-date modes by which HIV is transmitted. Unfortunately, these modes still appear invisible to those engaged in HIV research in Cameroon.

Furthermore, an anthropological conceptual approach based upon the social network paradigm may broaden the significance of social connectivity to the social-pathological causes of a disease, especially HIV. Indeed, an inquiry into social connectivity from the social network approach by both epidemiologists *and* "social science researchers may raise new ways of HIV prevention through changes in people's behavior" (Winkelman, 2009:72). Sexual networks through mobile phones usage seem to be complex, yet, this complexity may become clear to us if we consider HIV as social disease, especially as a good deal of research

recommends behavior change as the best strategy for prevention. As a result, an inquiry by anthropologists of sexual risk behaviors through mobile phone use, can be considered as research on the “secretive or hidden aspects of high risk behaviors” (Ibid) and as such complement epidemiological research. To assess these hidden aspects of mobile phone use indeed requires ethnographic observation of the new forms of social networking, as this may lay bare new “sexual values, interpersonal dynamics and social interaction patterns that contributes to deliberate behaviors” (Ibid) and thus comprise channels of high risks that have been neglected so far.

Through a social network conceptual framework, researchers can illuminate the potential of mobile phone usage in creating and maintaining sexual mixing patterns among young people and those older than them. Besides Thornton, other anthropologists (especially members of the Committee on Anthropological Demography) have been trying to discuss - through a wide range of methods including sexual network analysis - to determine the networking modeling of HIV transmission in different African regions. In the same way, it may be worthwhile to also pay attention social networking and modeling of HIV transmission through the impact that mediated communication has on sexuality. Unfortunately, only little attention has been paid through this lens, which shows that researchers have not fully understood the potential of using mobile phones as techniques and methods of reaching a specific goals (Scupin and Decorse, 2011). Therefore, social connectivity from the social network conceptual approach comprises the use of technology through which anthropologists can give account of socio-cultural systems. In particular, the potential of using mobile phones as techniques around matters concerning sexuality nowadays may seen as human strategies to achieve social goals through techno-social pathways. In brief, it is important to consider such devices and their usage through an anthropological lens and see them as local ways through which risk behaviors in the current socio-cultural system can be monitored.

### **3.1.4. Explaining the concepts of sexual risk in network theory**

Epidemiological explanations for disease spread and the risk of infections might build upon the social network conceptual frame. Social science researchers are providing epidemiological evidences concerning the further spread of HIV transmission due to risk behaviors of young people who make use of social media, for instance while they connect online with adults to arrange sexual encounters. In the same way, mobile phones create,

facilitate and maintain sexual relations between two previously unconnected individuals. In addition, they consequently facilitate risk behavior, especially through modes of social bonds or social contracts such as those established to exchange sex for material support (one of the social goals for young people). These bonds and social contracts, materialized by gifts from sexual partners, are meant to maintain the sexual relation going after the initial connection has been made.

From a network approach, the risk for HIV infection is inherent to the engagements that social connectivity involves as means to achieve social goals, particularly the interaction with sex-seeking individuals (formerly strangers) who might object to condom use. This risk is most likely when sexual communication is restricted, as sexual communication, research suggests, increases the likelihood to use contraceptives by sexually active adolescents (Wildman et al. 2006). One way through which sexual communication may be hindered in social networking, is through self-silencing. This term is mostly used by social psychologists (as part of the self-theory) in a situation where a sexual partner initiates and maintains a sexual relationship in a self-sacrificing way. Participants (especially high school students) pointed out their experiences which remind those of self-silencing, especially in the case of sexual partners to whom they depend on for material support. Sexual partners who offer material support tend to dominate the sexual liaison and make it difficult for the receiving partner to communicate about safe sex.

The risk in sexual relationships, especially between those who are only recently connected (or even strangers) is consistent with Weeks' (2011:24) conceptual approach about 'agency' and 'choice' in matters concerning sexuality. Week's notions of risk highlight processes through which one's agency may be restricted through material inequalities as seen in relationships between young people and casual partners (sugar daddies or mummies) who offer basic needs. The search by young people to achieve social goals explains the desire for them to engage in social connectivity which in turn might reduce their agency due to the inequality within the relationship. Social connectivity as means to achieve social benefits, thus further constitutes broader processes of powerlessness due to material inequality, which in turn increases vulnerability to HIV. These forms of social networking are equally related to Marxist's theories, since Marx, according to Weeks (2011:23), mentions that "individuals may believe that they have full freedom of choice, including around sexuality, but they are really under tutelage." Understanding how the risk processes mentioned above are linked to

mobile phone connectivity, is quite complex, and that is why Thornton argues social relations meant to map sexual networks are invisible and unimagined.

Bajos and Marquet (2000) stress the risks that individuals may experience as a result of interactive behaviors, and they investigate such behaviors through a social interaction model in their social network analysis. The authors put forward that a social relations conceptual approach determines sexual partner's interactive behavior more than individual characteristics. Following Bajos and Marquet's risk approach, texting and calling comprise connected sets endowed with interactive behavior, which we cannot understand immediately. Van Campenhoudt et al. (1997) contends that all the communication and action that leads to the creation of a sexual relation, is known as sexual interaction, and his network model concerning texting and calling patterns may help to identify risky sexual relationship involvements. Van Campenhoudt discerned several types of commitments and how these are crucial for understanding the manner through which sexual partners communicate about AIDS. Van Campenhoudt (1999) differentiates two types of relationship involvement. First, he discerns what he calls "fusion relationships," which are relationships that depend on the sexual partner's levels of expectations. According to the author, this type of sexual relation is based on intimacy, what binds the two partners are love and romantic features. Therefore, from a social network approach and based on the norms of committed relations (romance, love, and such), young people expect romantic text messages or calls to maintain their relationship. Secondly, Van Campenhoudt mentions "associative relationships," which are similar to those explored in this study. In these types of relations, according to Van Campenhoudt, text messages from one partner to another include strategies to entice the other partner, especially the messages from the one who provides material support.

This model is relevant to my data about safe sex communication among participants in Yaoundé. When asked whether they communicate about the use of condoms, they responded in three ways as follows: (a) some said "yes" they do communicated about condoms with sexual partners, secondly (b), others said "no" they don't and (c), the majority (as we shall see in chapter 5) said they "sometimes" communicate with sexual partners about condom use. The latter response (c) which was expressed by most of the participants made me conclude that their safe sex practices are inconsistent, a finding acknowledged by previous researchers such Meekers and Klein (2002). In other words, young people communicate about the use of

condoms, but communication is inconsistent as it depends the type of sexual partner they are connected with.

### **3.2. Culture theory**

Contemporary discourse about mobile phone use also relates technology to culture theory. Culture theory, as a part of anthropology, attempts to understand the heuristic concept of culture from scientific perspectives. Researchers use this theoretical concept to explain the social and cultural determinants of health, notably from the following constructs: culture as a system of thoughts and behaviors shared by a group of people, cultural backgrounds have tremendous impacts on our lives, and culture contributes to the richness of human experiences. Culture is a system of thoughts and behaviors shared by a group of people (Geert, 1973). I will apply the structural model of cultural theory to discuss how mobile phone usage relates to sexual risk behaviors among young people. Starting from this conceptual framework, I consider the opposite of things according the Lévi-Straussian dialectics, that is, thinking about the world in binary opposites such as male and female, tradition and modernity, gift and sex, power and vulnerability. According to Lévi-Strauss, every culture can be understood through these opposites. In my study, the dialectical shift due to the emergence of mobile phone and the appropriation of its usage in local lives can be seen from a tradition versus modernity model. I apply this dual model to courtship, where new communication technology devices nowadays are the opposite of age-old traditional forms of courtship such as handwritten love letters. The risks are suggested by the dual model. But I am aware that deeper may reveal a more complex non-dual structure.

#### **3.2.1. The concept of modernity in new communication technology and sexuality**

Researchers like De Bruijn, Nyamnjoh and Brinkman (2009) state that 1 out of 50 Africans had access to mobile phones by 2000 and by 2008, this ratio tremendously change to 1 out of 3 using a mobile phone. Apart from mobile phone use that this study employs in explaining the facilitation of sexual flirting activities by youth, Johnson-Hanks (2007) also informs about the popularity of internet or email-mediated marriages by Cameroonian women. In the same way, while women embrace the internet to look and think beyond the nation's border (transnational move), young people use these devices to achieve social goals. One way through which they achieve their social goals is by interplaying between mobile phones, the

internet and sexuality. Thus, they use these devices to create social contacts which in tend help them to get the most things that they need. Early theories concerning human sexuality state that sexual activity, sexual behavior and far more are the social modes through which humans express their sexualities. Sexual relations can take various forms such as flirting, intimacy, seduction and dating. During fieldwork in Yaoundé, we collected data on how mobile phone usage is integrated in this forms of sexual relations. For instance, young people who go to Djeuga and Katios nightclubs dance and try to seduce. As soon as one partner, usually the one trying to solicit sex realizes he or she has succeeded to seduce the other through dancing, the next thing will be to ask a phone number. Next, young people use mobile phones to attract sexual attention (flirt) either by sending sexually-suggestive or romantic messages or using bodily language to attract another. Through the use of mobile phones, people arrange meetings to display their concern for others, especially those they want to establish sexual relations with. As far as intimacy is concern, new communication technologies, especially mobile phones play a great role as a simple text message can increase passion between two intimate sexual partners.

### **3.2.2. Understanding young people, sexuality and new communication technology from youth culture concepts**

The above arguments concerning new communication technologies, young people and sexuality, are also informed by youth culture theory. Researchers use this theory to put forward models and conceptual frameworks to construct young people, including their sexual cultures, as unique sets of culture based on contrastive ways of life (beliefs, behaviors, styles and interests) according to age, that is young opposed to old. Note that some researchers however see youth culture as dynamic and fluid, therefore it is framed neither from aspects of formal education, nor age status but from signs of being a product of tensions in the relationship of younger people and adults.

In Cameroon, young people create social borders with the elder generation through youth culture. Consequently, youth culture can be considered as a way of life of adolescents that differs from adults. As a separate culture within a wider culture (what most researchers refuse to acknowledge), its members construct their own social identities, including emerging mediated-communication behavior patterns. Some social science researchers who carry out research on youth culture focus on deviance as the social impact (see for example, Longe et

al, 2009). Sociologists have been particularly involved on this aspect to develop social facts about youth and society. They look into critical issues relating crime to youth actions or to behaviors that violate social norms. This concept can be usefully introduced into my study on mobile phone use in Yaoundé. Indeed, from the deviancy conceptual framework, failures to confirm with norms and rules of sexual fidelity since the emergence of mobile phones are many, as illustrated by the possession of two mobile phones to manage two or more sexual relations, the escape from parental control through mobile phones, the use of text messages to entice sexual partners.

Anthropologists in the same way have been involved in critical issues from the youth culture conceptual approach, for example, to analyze the link between youth and alcohol and drug abuse-related crimes (e.g. rape). As for this study, my focus is put on the role of mobile phones in maintaining youth identities through in-group communication, which consequently facilitates sexual activities, as observed in Yaoundé's bars, restaurants and nightclubs. These drinking and dancing spots are likely to be circles for flirtatious dates and sexual risk behaviors inasmuch as mobile phone usage significantly induces flirtatious activities. Accordingly, acquiring a mobile phone and using it for dating appears to be updating and adapting oneself to changing social networks. According to field data, the easiest way to get a phone (which is preferably the latest brand) is to accept it as a gift from sex-seeking individuals, often elder people. This finding is persistent with earlier ones on prevailing practices to exchange sex for gifts, not only in Cameroon, but in the entire sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, Moore and co-workers (2007) found that sex for money or gifts has been a common occurrence among girls in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

Famous theorists on youth culture include Talcott Parsons and John Colemans, August Comte and Herbert Spencer. These structural-functionalists<sup>38</sup>, also known as functionalist sociologists, focused on youth as a single form of culture<sup>39</sup>. In order to frame what is youth culture, they employed the concept of *anomie*. This term was introduced by French anthropologist and sociologist Emile Durkheim in his book entitled *Suicide* (1897) or *Le suicide*. In this book, Durkheim explored suicide rates and laid blame on a lack of social

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<sup>38</sup> Theorists whose thinking sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability.

<sup>39</sup> Also see Fornas (1995) mentioning that youth is what belongs to the future, and young people have been associated with what is new in culture. When Fornas points on the negative end of youth culture, in the case of Cameroon, we can quickly refer to current sexual behavior and the implication for young people's sexual health, that is, the social aspects of youth culture that may predispose young people to perils of reproductive health.



order to regulate behavior in society. In all likelihood, a crisis of *anomie* in society means that values are out of control and new ones cannot be developed to regulate the shortfall.

Durkheim concludes that when a society reaches this state of crisis, there is futility, with lack of purpose and emotional emptiness and even despair. Besides, through the conceptual framework of Durkheim, Talcott Parsons (1942) mentions that the intense parent-children affective relations in a nuclear family are not broken off immediately since they require a period of transition before being severed. On the contrary, young people by-pass parental control and turn to break effective relations of the nuclear family (mentioned by Talcott Parsons) through the use of mobile phones in Yaoundé.

Contemporary sociologists and anthropologists study critical issues such as crime and sexual behaviors from the Durkheimian conceptual framework of “normlessness” (*anomie*) too, otherwise known as the processes through which social norms have been ravaged. Through his *anomie* conceptual shift, Durkheim accuses (a) the division of labor and (b) the rapid social change of breaking down the social order. In fact, the second accusation leads me to consider the use of new communication technology as a factor in the breakdown of social order. Therefore, the breakdown of social order conceptual framework informs my study on the social impact of mediated-communication from Durkheim's *anomie*. Durkheim believes that the morals upheld by a society depend on its social structure. Consequently, he claims, one will understand the organization of a society and its intimate structure once one unravels it morals.

Besides this analysis about mobile phone usage and changing culture from the *anomie* conceptual framework, some anthropologists on Africa present young people as society's (positive) actors, instead of looking at them from a deviant and apparently unapproved social (sexual) behavior lens. For example, Durham (2000) condenses the social imagination of youth in Africa, claiming that, although little anthropological attention is paid to them, African youths are nonetheless at the center of social change. They contribute to the political, cultural and economic change across the continent, she contends.

Another anthropologist, Buscholtz (2002), defends the construction of youth in Africa from a discipline called “anthropology of youth,” which revisits questions initially raised in earlier sociological and anthropological frameworks, while introducing new issues that arise under current economic, political and cultural conditions. The notion of social change mentioned by Buscholtz is crucial to the ways through which the Cameroonian anthropologist

Basile Ndjio analyzes the emergence of technological devices such as mobile phones which young people employ to increase their chances in current global capitalism. Ndjio (2008) elaborates on the moves by young Cameroonians to create wealth (that is increasing their longer-term life chances), through swindling by using internet and mobile phones<sup>40</sup>. Bettina Frei (2012) also contributes to this social change notion through a mediated communication conceptual frame. Her approach is largely cited throughout this study because it is by far the most relevant work that I came across concerning young people's use of communication technology to increase their longer-term life chances (in her case, in Bamenda). I repeatedly refer to her analysis of young people's knowledge of distance places (and the presumed better life in Europe or America as Eldorado) which can be reached only through transnational marriages mediated through internet and mobile phones.

Still, Buscholtz's arguments on social change significantly contribute to emerging conceptual shifts about youths in transition, especially as groups with particular "value systems" that are different from the surrounding dominant culture. Accordingly, through the adoption of new communication technology, young people create "value systems" in new cultural formations with combined elements, notably global capitalism, trans-nationalism, and local culture. In order to make it clear what it means to be youth in Africa, she mentions that preadolescents may consider themselves as youths while others in their 30s and 40s also consider themselves youths. This is to say youths are called and defined differently in different cultures. For instance, the Romans called youth "*iuventa*" and considered the ages between thirty to forty to be youth whereas those above forty who were called "*senectus*," the elderly. The definition of youth itself is fluid worldwide and in Cameroon too, where one is considered as youth until when he/she attends social adulthood (Fokwang 2007). According to Fokwang, many Cameroonians (for example in their thirties) who are duly married, possess a house, have a good job and if possible passed the rite of passage (initiation), will be considered adults. Consequently, youths who fulfill these social requirements (having houses, wives, jobs and such) and thus achieved one of the three baseline social goals in this study (see introduction), are considered as adults. On the contrary, young people (still in the thirties) who are not married, have no houses or job (what applies essentially to the participants of this study) are considered as youth.

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<sup>40</sup> These swindlers are known as "*feymen*" in Cameroon. Ndjio developed the term "*feymania*" as the use of tricks (swindling) for young people to create wealth through internet fraud (see also Glickman (2005) on Nigerian 419 scamming through the use of mobile phones).

One of the groundbreaking books on youth in Africa is De Boeck and Honwana's *Makers and breakers: Children and youth in postcolonial Africa* (2005). Both De Boeck and Honwana (2005), as well as Buscholtz (2002), approach youth from anthropology of youth with focus on the following: modernity, urbanization, social change. They address key issues concerning disempowered and vulnerable youths in Africa. In particular, Honwana and De Boeck proclaim that authorities in Africa see these children as social problems; yet, the children are invisible heroes whose talents are wasted because nobody cares to listen to what they possess, often simply because they live on streets. The authors use these children to highlight the plight of young people in the post-colony<sup>41</sup>. De Boeck and Honwana succeed, through the plight of street children, to broaden the understanding of the social processes and the predicaments that African youths are facing. In her article on the way street children in Kinshasa make use of public space, Geenen (2009) shows how they succeed in "colonizing" (as they put it) public places and turn them into their homes, despite the efforts by the city authorities to chase them out of the streets.

The crucial information we got from De Boeck and Honwana is the need for researchers and development agents to discover what is positive about these children and not the opposite. They use other examples like child soldiers in Mozambique and Liberia to portray the image of children who are not meant to kill but are forced to because of the continent's predicament. Elsewhere, critics have used similar perspectives like that of De Boeck, Honwana, Buscholtz and Durham to discuss the crisis of young people. Honwana and De Boeck (2005)'s argument, in addition to that of Durham (2000) and Buscholtz (2002), provide further relevant theoretical insights to support the adoption of mobile phones, including opportunities created in usage, to achieve youngster's social goals. In the introduction, I have emphasized that young people in Yaoundé are faced with the continent's predicaments (as mentioned by Honwana and De Boeck) which do not give them opportunities to achieve longer-term life goals. In the next section, I will present the appropriation of communication technologies from a modernity discourse<sup>42</sup>, specifically the discourse in line with changing culture, including its social dimensions on young people's reproductive health.

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<sup>41</sup> See Achille Mbembe's *On the postcolony*(2001).

<sup>42</sup> Also see Hunter (2002) on latest fashion and sexuality, mentioning that one of the latest up-to-date designations of modernity in Africa is fashion, in *Township girls like fashion too much*.

From its etymology, that is “modenus” which means “just now” in Latin, modernity implies the latest, and social science researchers, oftentimes, use this term to refer to what is new in Africa (specifically the ubiquity of communication technology). The history of modernity begins with the history of enlightenment which historians use to exhibit that mankind has reached the moment of reason. Nevertheless, there are different opinions about what modernity implies. To Karl Marx, it means the beginning of capitalism. Others, like Max Weber, refer to modernity as the era of rationalization. Contemporary critics of modernity in Africa claim that African modernity<sup>43</sup> came as a result of the failure of modernization agenda to create a positive development, especially with the taking over of authority by African leaders from the colonial masters in the 1960’s. Unfortunately, as critics claim, the new African elites whom many thought will accomplish the modernization dream, become more elitist than the colonial masters they opposed. Others criticized modernization for being western-based, thus, for African nations that will fail to be westernized are considered inferior. In the worst of the cases, critics attacked the modernization agenda – through the new African elites – claiming it led to huge corruptions within governments across Africa.

Through the cultural lens, modernity implies the emergence of new social conditions accompanied by new challenges. As the ubiquity of mobile phone usage becomes a component of modernity, anthropologists as well as sociologists acknowledge this condition has brought change. This change, they believe, has equally altered the life experiences of young people, as it affects their relationship with family and friends, as well as their lifestyle. In Yaoundé, the impact of the change triggered by mobile phone usage, especially in the realm of sexuality, has to be negotiated in a series of risks that were largely unknown to previous generations that did not use mobile phones. This statement is persistent among anthropologists who criticize the modernization agenda for societies to accept change and deplore that communities who maintain their traditions are at risk, because traditions are harmful to development. According to these anthropologists, modernization brought about inequalities along with the emergence of a new lifestyle, wealthy elites now working in cities and poor agriculturalists working in rural settings.

Debates concerning modernity also incorporate cultural appropriation propositions similar to the local socio-cultural processes which were used by anthropologists – from the 1990s

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<sup>43</sup> See Geschiere, Peter, Pels, Peter and Meyer, Birgit eds. (2008) in *Readings in modernity in Africa*.

onwards – to describe risk factors for behaviors leading to HIV infection (Schoepf, 2001). Due to these processes, anthropologists considered AIDS as a cultural phenomenon which is affecting the quality of social life and impacting on cultural practices in global and local ways. This is consistent with the proposition by Katz (2002) as he framed the adoption of mobile phone and how its use affects every aspect of our personal lives. As local people depend on these devices and adopt them in their daily lives, questions concerning the risks, including those of HIV transmission, are raised.

Still, social critics of modernity believe that new communication technologies re-invent old issues, including those on sexuality in new ways that are intimately related to the problematic of the devices. The same questions comprise the theories of knowledge, particularly those from the socio-cultural model, to understand diseases spread. This model aims at understanding human behavior, for example, using participant observation to understand how and why young people use mobile phones to achieve social goals. In the process of trying to accomplish these goals, young people may tend to barter sex for survival with a possibility of “difficulty to talk with a new sexual partner about contraception” (Coleman and Ingham, 1999).

### **3.2.3. Understanding mobile phone risk behaviors from cultural epidemiology and the causal assemblage paradigms**

In the previous section, I have presented ways through which mobile phones are imagined and represented but also how their presence in local settings creates dramatic and unprecedented breaks between the past and the present, particularly in relation to what Appadurai calls “new global cultural economy” (2008). In this section, I strive to point out the necessity of considering mobile phone usage in the epidemiological explanation of HIV transmission among young people in Yaoundé. First, based on participants’ self-report during participant observation, there is an indication that mobile phones are not just technical devices for voice calls, but components of the social processes that put the lives of young people at risk. Secondly, sexual flirtations through mobile phone usage may comprise, in part, the “causal assemblages” (Duun and Janes, 1986) that epidemiologists need in explaining the social causality of infectious diseases. Therefore, in this section, I present a current theoretical framework that maybe applied to mobile phone usage as socio-cultural processes to disease spread. This approach, from the cultural epidemiological model, is known as the causal assemblages of disease spread.

Epidemiologists use the term “causal assemblages”<sup>44</sup> as a basic approach to understand the aggregate of different factors responsible for disease spread, including HIV/AIDS. The term is generated from the spider web to explain how various factors (both clinical and social) lead to the cause of diseases transmissions. Similar to the spider web, also known as cobweb, spun by spiders to trap their prey, the causal web (which has a clinical and a social part) is responsible for the spread of HIV. The causal assemblages responsible for the spread of infectious diseases equally suggest why several academic disciplines incorporate epidemiology to examine these causes. An example is the cooperation between epidemiology and anthropology while studying health-related behavior. Both disciplines are complementary, as epidemiology “may be concerned primarily by determining the relation of behavior to disease, medical anthropology, most often, focuses on the social and cultural correlates of behavior” (Dunn and Janes 1986). One way through which James Trostle (the prominent scientist behind cultural epidemiology) encourages the cooperation between anthropology and epidemiology, is through data collection. According to Trostle (2008), epidemiology is a cultural practice and as result, cultural epidemiology forms an important parallel to social epidemiology. Trostle (2008) also suggests that the synergy between epidemiology and anthropology on data collection is a process of social exchange that will bring about a new attention to what new things (such as mobile phones) in society contribute to a changing culture and health.

Trostle’s model also stipulates that “people within groups may be aware of their norms, but those norms themselves change over time” (Ibid:3). This statement applies to youth culture, which is fluid and changes over time, and each change in turn is due to changes in group norms. In other words, communication technology is changing the society in which young people live and participate, therefore, the values and norms of their groups also change. Weber & Dixon (2007) state that young people are part of a highly dynamic society and technology strongly influences everyday processes in their lives. Together with internet (connectivity online), mobile phone usage contributes to youth culture elements that adults have been pointing out as the roots of the moral degradation and of the changing values of the younger generations.

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<sup>44</sup> Relates to Srivastava (2005) on: The explosion of technology related to mobility, both in travel and information/communication, and its coincidence with decades of HIV pandemic in Africa is indicative of the “multiple causation” that epidemiologists increasingly pay attention to. Mobile phones have moved from being simple technological objects to key social objects .

### **3.2.4. Understanding risky sexual behavior from mobile phone usage through a comparative study model**

The final framework that I present to make sense of the research questions, this time specifically of the comparison between sexual risk behaviors in different socio-cultural backgrounds as Ghent and Yaoundé, is the cross-cultural comparative study approach. Historically, Edward B. Tylor and Lewis H. Morgan were the first anthropologists believed to have carried out cross-cultural studies. In his earliest research, Tylor thought using cross-cultural methods would contribute to the explanation of distinctive sexual behaviors.

At the meeting of the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) in 1888, a British scholar, named Galton opposed Tyler's model that cross-cultural similarities could stem from borrowings or common descent, and not from changes of these cultures, as Tyler assumed. The disagreement between the two led to what is now referred to as “Galton’s problem” (see Naroll, 1965). Followers of Tyler and Morgan, such as the American anthropologist George Peter Murdock in his *Social structure* (1949) and in his subsequent publications, proposed that sufficiently separate cultures could be found to test the hypotheses and subject data to appropriate statistical methods. We deem Yaoundé and Ghent as such cases.

The cross-cultural conceptual approach of these anthropologists informs my study on the disclosure of adhesions between mobile phone usage and risky sexual behaviors emerging from sexual values and norms of Yaoundé youth culture. Observational evidence during fieldwork in Yaoundé shows that mobile phone usage is at the center of the processes of cultural creation and identity formation by young people in Yaoundé. Yet, these processes are not the same in Ghent, thus, their identity formation through mediated ways are different. I participated in the life-worlds of young people in Ghent and Yaoundé in order to examine the ritual aspects of sexual risk behaviors in these two different cultural backgrounds.

Other studies that have depicted the importance of a cross-cultural approach to sexual behavior, are by Parker (2001) and Herdt (1991). The latter states that if social science research pays attention to the ways cross-cultural differences structure the meaning of sexual behavior, a crosscutting strategy for HIV intervention could be effected<sup>45</sup>. Furthermore, both

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<sup>45</sup> See also Ember and Peregrine's (2010) confirmation that comparing the characteristics that one society possesses and society lacks, helps anthropologists to interpret cultural differences, including sexual culture. Peter George Murdock (a former mentor of Ember and Peregrine) also contributed to the propagation of cross-cultural approach through the construction of a full text database on cultures of the world, known as “the Human

Parker and Herdt claim that the lack of attention to cross-cultural methods on HIV research has led to theoretical gaps that prevented the development of further initiatives of inquiries on sexual behavior. They claim that conducting insightful research into complex social and cultural meanings linked to sexual behaviors may lead to the development of proper initiatives to reduce HIV transmission. Finally, Robert Thornton has contributed to broaden the importance of sexual network analysis on HIV research through a cross-cultural conceptual approach. Thornton provides a huge regional variation through a comparison between Uganda and South Africa. Thornton's cross-cultural approach, as I mentioned in the introduction, motivates my study on the application of network analysis to understand modes of sexual networking (through mobile phone usage) as cross-cultural dimensions of everyday life. According to Thornton, assessing the cross-cultural configuration of large-scale sexual networks will contribute to innovative strategies to reduce HIV prevalence rather than through individual-based approach.

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Relations Area Files" (HRAF). Murdock has inspired many anthropologists who test explanations based on published samples of societies.



## **Chapter 4: HIV sexual risk behavior in the era of new communication technology in Cameroon**

By means of introduction to HIV sexual risk behaviors at the era of new communication technology, I will start with a brief historical outline of this technology in Cameroon.

Firstly, telephony in Cameroon commenced with the installation of landlines by the Germans in the year 1893 (Frei 2013). After independence, the Cameroonian government took over these landlines and they came within the area of responsibility of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (P&T). Headed by president Ahmadou Ahidjo (1960-1982), the then government used landlines above all to coordinate the administrative, military and health services. For example, the government thought medical doctors, more than any other civil servants, needed to have phones in their offices through which they could handle emergencies in hospitals. Next, the military officers and NCOs also had to have phones through which they could be reached during times of insecurity. In addition, the government opened up the market to private individuals to subscribe to landlines which they could use at home.

As time elapsed, the government decentralized telecommunication by creating the company Cameroon Telecommunications (CAMTEL) which from then onwards handled most of the telecommunication services of P&T. While CAMTEL was expanding its telephone services in Yaoundé and Douala and later on in other cities, the P&T instead strengthened its grip on postal services. As the decrease of P&T telephone services became apparent, some of the P&T telephone engineers moved to CAMTEL. As a result, CAMTEL became very popular, especially after installing their mobile phone network applications which the South African company Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) hired for some time when it came to invest in Cameroon. At that moment, MTN decided to adopt the name CAMTEL Mobile, but when the MTN succeeded to install its very own applications, they changed the name CAMTEL Mobile into MTN Cameroon. Simultaneously, the Orange group was struggling and finally succeeded to install their applications too, and was named Orange Cameroon. As these two companies (MTN and Orange) opened up their mobile telephony services markets and landlines were costly and only used by a few elites until

about the year 2000 (Frei, 2012), the use of mobile phones quickly gained grounds. Since then, mobile phones became first accessible to most of the Cameroonians and subsequently deeply integrated into their daily lives. As a consequence, communicative practices, including those on sexuality, began to change too.

In this paragraph, I will explain how mobile phone usage gradually became integrated into the sexual discourse of Yaoundé's youth culture. To begin with, as mobile phone usage became affordable and widespread, users adopted jargons such as "to flash" or "flashing" meaning to beep, "*hala*" or "*hala me*" meaning to call or call me. For example, a girl who was separating with her boyfriend – after their date – would say "*hala me when you reach home*" meaning "call me when you reach home." The word *hala* in Cameroon colloquial language means "to yell at someone" and since yelling is attributed to violence, so did local users who placed a mobile phone around the ear consider the sound of the other speaker to be violent, a violence equal to yelling (*hala*).

Next, young people in Yaoundé started to introduce terms such as *rendez-vous* into mobile phone usage and culture. In the first case, dating between two sexual partners has always been referred to as a *rendez-vous*. In French, a *rendez-vous* (also used as a borrowed word in English) means an appointment. Normally, one would say "I have an appointment with a medical doctor" or "I have a *rendez-vous* with the medical doctor." Yet, when you talk about a *rendez-vous* in Yaoundé, most young people would feel you are talking about a possible date with the person you want to have sexual intercourse with. If a young girl would tell someone at home (say her sister) that she had to leave the house now because she was having a *rendez-vous*, the parents automatically raise questions as to who she is going to date (and not just meet). Nonetheless, if the girl would say she was having an appointment, parents would not be sensitive because it would be if she had just a meeting. However, since the appearance of mobile phones, the same girl simply sends a text message to her sister, informing her where she is going (the *rendez-vous*). The text messaging is done in a bid to escape parental control. Accordingly, mobile phone usage became a technical and cultural device through which young people arranged activities that they would never want their parents or guardians to be aware of. In fact, mobile phones became convenient devices to achieve many goals, and cheating and escaping surveillance from parents is one among the others.

Next, mobile phone usage became a mode of connecting (creating social ties) with individuals through whom young people could gain material support, in exchange for sex. These individuals are generally called “*mbomas*” but other names apply according to a place’s youth culture. For instance, while young people in Yaoundé nickname a sugar mummy an *allumeuse* and a sugar daddy an *allumeur*, youngsters in Buea call their *mboma* a “*sponsor*.” The *mbomas*, who mostly involve in extra-marital affairs, would in turn baptize their younger sexual partners as *deuxième bureau*, that is, the second to their wives. The crucial thing here is that the new practices such as beeping precipitated pre-negotiated strategies of communicating and meeting between young people and *mbomas*. For example, a student (male or female) usually makes pre-arrangements so that once his/her *mboma* sees a missed call, it is to inform the *mboma* that he/she has left school. Since this would be pre-negotiated, whenever the *mboma's* phone rings, the *mboma* will not pick the call, but yet know what the beeping stands for. Another example is when a young person has a *rendez-vous* with a *mboma* and the two of them had earlier agreed that the moment the young person leaves the house, he/she would beep to acquaint the *mboma* of the fact that he/she is now leaving.

More recently, sexting has become popular in Yaoundé as many young people now possess smartphones and are continuously online, do a simple mobile phone allows for sexting too. Sexting is the sending of sexually-suggestive messages or nude pictures through text messages. I recently interviewed one of my Facebook friends (M, who uses a smartphone, and a Blackberry for that matter) in a casual way about her use of her smartphone to chat and send pictures to friends. She told me that she usually buys MTN credit for 7000 frs CFA (10.67 euro), scratches the card and enter the pin to recharge her credit, and next she uses another code which MTN issues to clients who want to configure their credits to internet use. Once she has configured her credit to use the internet, she will log on to her Facebook, Skype and Viber accounts.<sup>46</sup> This friend told me that her steady partner lives in Douala and that he often sends her nude selfies through Viber on her phone, and vice versa. She also told me that she and her friends do chat with men who solicit sex through Viber, and send what the men describe as “sexy pictures” when asked. Most of these men, she says, are men who send them Facebook friend request. Once you accept the friendship, they scrutinize your profile for your pictures and when need be, they will start

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<sup>46</sup> See <http://www.viber.com> and <http://www.skype.com/en>, for Skype. With android technology applications, mobile phone users can download these apps such as Viber through which they call and send messages including pictures to fellow Viber users for free.

chatting online and end up asking your phone number. Then once you gave them your number, they ask for more sexy pictures and try to arrange a first date (say at Bonas). Such men, especially those who are married, often log on to Facebook only when they are in their offices because when they do so at home, it triggers conflicts with their wives. Yet, with mobile phones, they can conveniently communicate with the sex partners they have on Facebook.

#### **4.1. New communication technology, youth culture and sexuality in Yaoundé**

The above elaborations enhance our understanding of new communicative practices and how these have become part of youth culture in Yaoundé. New communication technologies are hugely at play in the way social relations are structured in the city's contemporary sexual culture. In urban centers like Douala and Yaoundé, communication technologies create social signatures of urban youth culture which influence sexual behaviors. As a result of these social signatures, parents and educators disapprove of mobile phones and feel that usage increases youth's risk behaviors. More precisely, although they approve of the acquisition of mobile phones because they are useful for matters such as business transactions, social support, security and safety, they disapprove of them in matters as in the realm of crime and sexual flirtation. Many of these parents and educators feel mobile phones allow us to have things which were inaccessible through traditional ways.

#### **4.2. Anthropological approach to sexual activities**

In the last four decades, anthropologists as Suggs and Marshall (1971:xi) mentioned that sexual activity contributes to the balance between nature and culture. These two anthropologists also put forward that due to its reproductive feature, no human or animal being could survive without sex, adding that few societies could survive – in the sense of perpetuation – without sexual activity (Suggs and Marshall 1971:218). Anthropologists also consider sexual activity as nature's way of ensuring future generations and safeguarding the life of the species within the wider rhythms of the cosmos. Arguably, since mobile phone use appears to be at the center of sexual activities that eventually make up part of current Cameroonian youth culture, thus use is a component of contemporary courtship practices. At the macro-level of new communication technology, anthropologists theorize that sexual activities, culture contact and the process of globalization, are transforming local sexual practices and views. Anthropology has always paid attention to the cultural process that leads

to change during its long and fruitful existence, and will continue to do so at the era when the widespread adoption of mobile phone usage is evident in both youth and mainstream culture in Cameroon.

### **4.3. The risk for HIV infection among young people**

New communication technology entered our lives in perplexing ways in the realm of safety, care, social support, business and – most especially and for the purpose of this study – HIV risk behaviors. I mention the impact on sexuality as a special case because, according to MacKenzie and Wajcman (1999), new communication technology structures and changes the functioning of interpersonal relationship in ways that can precipitate tremendous risk among young people. The communicative practices considered as precipitating risk are those similar to the risk behaviors which encourage researchers to call the HIV pandemic as a behavioral disease (Stimson et al., 1996). Beside Stimson (Ibid), Rhodes (2008) even states that "of all risk factors relevant to mapping the determinants and the distribution of HIV, risk behavior is the most important" (Rhodes, 2008:209). Following Rhodes' argument, it comes as no surprise that contributions from a wide range of social science scholars working on sex research are desperately needed. As half of the new HIV infections worldwide occurs among young people aged 15–24 years (Marston and King 2006), an inquiry of the sexual risk behaviors that comprise part of youth culture (as those of Yaoundé in this study) is relevant. In other words, participants in this study fall in the age group (15-24) mentioned above and as such this study contributes to the research agenda that targets them as the group most at risk.

As I have emphasized throughout the study, three things (means to gain material support, increasing one status in the eyes of peers and the means to achieve longer-term life casual and transactional relationships in order to achieve these goals. Researchers, like Grello (1992), Selikow et al. (2002), Luke (2005), Traen and Lewin (2006), Swidler and Watkins (2007) and Shara et al. (2008), stressed these modes of risk behaviors as the possible determinants of HIV infection in sub-Saharan Africa. Still, transactional sexual relationships in Yaoundé have been mostly attributed to cross-generational sexual relations between youngsters and their *mbomas*.

### **4.4. Courtship through mobile phone usage**

Before courtship through mediated communication, such as text messages to express romantic love, became popular in Cameroon, there were other forms of courtship. For

instance, my very own uncles told stories about their secondary school days when mobile phones were non-existent, and boys and girls used other ways to create and maintain their sexual relations. One of these mediums for sexual solicitation was the hand written love letter. Another involved a gift, such as chocolates, biscuits and clothes. Courtship encounters, apart from those through hand written letters, consisted of face-to-face conversations, as compared to the airtime (phone) discussions between sexual partners today. Nowadays, a common way to establish connectivity is to seek another's phone number first and then intensify the connectivity through phone calls, text messages and, later on, gifts. This is called the rehearsal period and it also comprises a series of dates in spaces of sociability such as bars, restaurants and hotels. Many young people, especially females, prefer to wait until a series of text messages, calls and dates took place before they engage in sexual relations.

Although it appears clear that Cameroonian courtship ways have changed, there is still a dearth of scholarly knowledge on such changes. Nevertheless, popular media might help to deepen our insights of changes in courtship. For example, the *New York Times* (January 11, 2013 edition) in an article entitled *End of courtship* stated that dating has been reduced to a cycle of text messages. Similarly, in her book *The End of Sex: How Hookup Culture is Leaving a Generation Unhappy, Sexually Unfulfilled, and Confused About Intimacy* (2013), anthropologist Donna Freitas bemoans the hookup culture ensuing the use of texting and sexting as these became prominent practices in the sexual culture of college students at the US campuses. According to Freitas (2013), the main disadvantage of this sexual culture is that it concerns brief connections among young sexual partners, leaving little room for intimacy. In another paper presented at the International Professional Communication Conference Proceeding (IEEP 2005), Carolyn Wei (2005) put forward the need to study mobile phone use within the context of society, with a focus on the cultural, political and economic factors that influence phone use. She also points out that there is a sharp contrast in usage between industrial and non-industrial societies and from her arguments, one would logically imagine how mobile phone use has become the means through which young people and their peers “traditionally obtain and reciprocate information and services through social networks and personal connections” (Wei 2005:206).

Furthermore, in newspapers as *The Washington Post* (in its August 13, 2006 edition), the journalist Kevin Sullivan mentions that Saudi Arabia’s zealous religious police can arrest and jail anyone who violates the rules of culture, which consists of a mixture of tradition and the country’s ultra-strict *Wahhabi* Islam (Washington Post 2006). Due to the strict laws of

*Wahhabi*, social contact between men and women who did not previously know each other are restricted. Therefore, when you visit a restaurant and other social circles in Saudi Arabia, you find people sitting in different sections according to their families in order to avoid interactions between previously unconnected persons. Any attempt to break these rules may lead to arrest and imprisonment, Kevin Sullivan adds. The journalist also mentions that the emergence of mobile phones enabled men to adopt alternative ways to get in touch with women. They could for instance write their phone number on “something heavy to be thrown, usually a cassette tape” (Ibid), and toss this cassette into a woman’s car. Another way, according to Sullivan, is to hang around at an ATM (that is a Bank contact zone) or just around a shop and drop a scrap of paper with his phone number when a woman passes, and which she would then pick up. The fact that thousands of young people who did not have access to landline phones now possess mobile phones (International Communication press release 2008) “permit them to even talk discreetly without a parent listening” (Washington Post 2006). The Post also mentions that the Saudi government watched the spread of mobile phones with panic, and put a ban on mobile cameras in 2004 because it was regarded as an “assault to women’s privacy and modesty” (Ibid). If laws such as *Wahhabi* were applied in Cameroon before mobile phone usage had been adopted, both female and male Cameroonians would find it difficult to interact and create sexual relations. The laws of *Wahhabi* inform my study on how mobile phones usage overcame old ways of social interaction to the extent of facilitating more sexually-permissive activities.

Furthermore, *Taipei Times* (November 06, 2006 edition) points out that the spread of mobile phones in Somalia has changed courtship values. This newspaper states that in the failed state of Somalia, nothing else seemed to work apart from the steady boom in mobile phone usage. Paradoxically, according to another edition of *Tapei Times* (2009), this boom itself also had its consequences like elopements, extramarital pregnancies and a steady erosion of Somalia’s conservative values. The newspaper reveals how social connectivity through mobile phone usage facilitate the processes that leads to sexual and reproductive health consequences such as unwanted pregnancies and illicit sexual unions such as elopements. Stories similar to those about elopement through mobile phone usage in Somalia show up in daily Cameroonian discourse, particularly on dating and hook-ups through mobile phones or Facebook, as illustrated in popular media blogs. For example, in a blog called *Global press Journal*, Laura, a 22 year old student of Buea University, posts her experiences with a casual sexual partner she met on Facebook. She outlines how she first rehearsed the

relation through mobile phone and then finally had sex with this person, but just once. Indeed, the relationship ended in a way that the girl did not expect. After Laura had created her Facebook account, she soon received numerous invitations (known as “friend requests”) by men who wanted to become her Facebook friends. Among the many contacts she accepted, one stroke her that much as he was handsome and presumably wealthy as he worked for an oil company in Douala. As they chatted through Facebook, they finally exchanged phone numbers and started to interact more often through this medium. Laura became very excited and was ready to marry the man when he proposed to her through the phone. She told her friends and even called her parents to inform them about the arrival of the cherished would-be husband. The man came to Buea and looked exactly the way she expected, thus, she became more obsessed and that night they had sex without using condoms. The next day, the man left and Laura was still very excited. By the end of the day, Laura started asking herself questions, for instance, she thought they made a mistake by not using condoms during sex. She became worried and sent a text message to the man to share her worries. She him to disclose his HIV status to her, but regrettably, the man just replied her not to contact him anymore. Indeed, that was the end of their sexual relationship. Laura’s self-report illustrates how Facebook connectivity leads to mobile phone social connectivity which in turn leads to the risk-taking through unprotected sexual intercourse. Paying attention to why Laura became obsessed with that man and how quickly they connected to each other and finally had sexual intercourse, indicates the role of social goals, especially that of longer-term life changes (getting married to a wealthy person, an employee of an oil company). In other words, connecting with this man, first through Facebook and then through the mobile phone, suggests that Laura sees herself accomplishing a longer-term life goal, which is an assurance for a better future. Starting from Laura’s story, the man in question is probably a *mboma* who uses social media to connect with young girls and have sex with them. In the next section, I will present the risk a *mboma* relationship involves, following Weeks’ theoretical perspectives on sexuality.

#### **4.5. Risk involved in mboma-young girl relationships from Weeks’ point of view**

In his book entitled *The Language of Sexuality* (2011), Jeffrey Weeks extensively elaborates on terminologies related to sexuality and portrays how these words are conceptually framed and theorized as crucial discourses on sexuality and health. This work inspires my study in



issues on social contacts (with *mbomas*) through mobile phones and the sexual risk it involves. Firstly, Weeks' explanation of the term "choice" relates to the way I try to frame the exchange of sex for material inextricably bound up with *mbomas'* relationship with young people. Weeks (2011:6) points out that the freedom and determination for individuals to position themselves depends on their agency, that is whether they use their freedom to determine whom they have sex with and if the sexual intercourse will be protected or unprotected. Indeed, deliberately choosing to have a sexual relationship with a *mboma* and to decide whether or not condoms are used signals one's agency, notwithstanding the fact that these relationships are wanted for the purpose of material gains.

Furthermore, the agency of sexual partners during their communication determines his/her power for sexual decisions; this is what Meekers and Klein (2002) call condom use self-efficacy. In chapter 5, I mentioned that notwithstanding the number of sexual partners one may have, the latency of risk for HIV infection hugely depends upon the barriers to use condoms. During focus group discussions in high schools, I probed the frequency of communication about condom use, and applied the following scales: YES, NO and SOMETIMES. The theoretical approaches by Alder and Tschann (1997) and Wildman et al. (2006) of communication about condoms and the likelihood to use contraception, confirm the importance of such as survey among students. The likelihood of not using condoms depends on the sexual autonomy which in turn may be violated by the "exercise of another person's agency" (Weeks 2011:6). Such violation of one's autonomy may be possible through the gifts that create unequal relationships that finally may set up barriers to condom use. The image of bonding through gifts reminds what Weeks calls the "commodification of sex and its pleasures in ways connected to the spheres of profitability and identity in the twentieth century (Weeks 2011:Ibid). In the following section, I present mediated sexual activities such as casual sex without the involvement of cross-generational sexual relations as those with a *mboma*.

#### **4.6. Sexual risk behaviors at the Office of Schools and University Sports of Cameroon (OSUSC)**

In this section, I compare sexual risk behaviors of young people in Cameroon with casual sex experiences documented by Maticka-Tyndale et al. (1998:254) among by Canadian students during their spring break. As for Cameroon, it concerns the permissive sexual activities of university students during the fortnight of OSUSC games which take

place in spring each year. These “All university” games are organized in one of the six universities – Yaoundé 1, Ngaoundere, Buea, Dschang, Bamenda, Douala or Yaoundé 2. During this period, students engage in intense partying coupled with alcohol drinking which often leads to casual sex both with their peers (students) and with sex-seeking people (non-students) who take advantage of the festive atmosphere to have sex with students. Similarly, Maticka-Tyndale et al. (1998) put forward that among Canadian students this type of sexual activity develop during group holidays with friends, traveling and rooming together in a perpetual party atmosphere with high alcohol consumption and with sexually suggestive contests.

During OSUSC, students leave Ngaoundere, Bamenda, Dschang, Douala, Yaoundé 1 and Yaoundé 2 University play games during the day and party at night for a period of two weeks in April, simultaneously with the Canadian students. The Cameroonian students from Yaoundé 1 would leave together for an all-night coach trip (5 - 6 hours) to Buea, and make snack stops at places like Mbankomo, Edea, Douala, Tiko, and Mutengene. The more stops on the road, the more the students enjoy the trip amusing and it is during these stops that the casual sexual solicitations take off. For example, during a stop in Douala, a pair of previously unconnected persons will try to pair up and end up exchanging phone numbers in order to keep in touch after they have reached Buea.

Those who met and had casual sexual intercourse during may continue to do so while on the road back to Yaoundé. Others may at return spend a night in a hotel in Yaoundé to give their *mbomas* the opportunity to have a great time with them. Mobile phones are very crucial at that time because one may encounter another during the OSUSC and without exchanging phone numbers, it will be difficult to meet a second time because there are thousands of people each day at the sports scene. Still, most of the students stick to their intimate sexual partner after returning from OSUSC. In the case of the Canadian spring break, Maticka-Tyndale et al. (1998:255) mention that the conditions for involving into casual sex are driven by (a) agreements or promises that are formed between friends (pacts either to engage or not to engage in casual sex), (b) perceived norms and expectations of one's immediate reference group (subjective social norms), (c) beliefs about what is appropriate for a member in one's position or status (role beliefs), and (d) the internalized personal standards or moral codes (personal normative beliefs). Maticka-Tyndale et al. further explain that (a) and (b) represent the social group as the point of reference, whereas (c) and (d) represent the individual's transformation of social norms into self-expectations and standards and take the self as the

point of reference. Similar to materially driven sexual practices, casual sex can be driven by group pressure or by friendly-oriented activities which render sexual norms permissive.

#### **4.7. Remarks on casual and transactional sexual activities at the era of communication technology**

Casual sexual activities, such as those during OSUSC, differ from those in exchange for material gains. Yet, mobile phones are used to facilitate sexual flirtation in both kinds of cases. During the two weeks of OSUSC, students obviously grab their mobile phones to solicit a sexual partner, yet it might also hold a less obvious goal, for example, to gain material support. The use of mobile phone and the offering of gifts as a sexual solicitation strategy could be understood from the perspectives of Mauss, Malinowski and Homans who frame gifting as a learned behavior (Homans 1958). Furthermore, recent literature demonstrates how gift giving is one way to transmit a picture of us to other people's minds (Schwartz 1967). Transactional sex where a gift is exchanged, appears to display what women pursue the commodities portrayed by media images in the era of globalization. Furthermore, these transactional sexual activities have been referred to as the driving force behind HIV transmission in many African countries, including Cameroon. Research did point out that the origins of transactional sex are very often economic. More particularly, in Southern Africa and Malawi, it is believed that "the dynamics of transactional sex depend on the idea that women need money whereas men have it" (Watkins and Swidler 2007). Watkins and Swidler (Ibid) mention that to understand Malawian perceptions about transactional sex, we need to consider transactional sex to be part of a larger pattern of patron–client relations. As for casual sex in eastern Africa, Morris and Ferguson (2007) discerned a "hot spot" environment along a highway in the Kenyan Northern corridor, where truck drivers and sex workers interact.

In Cameroon, transactional and casual sexual practices, alongside other risky sexual behaviors, have been previously documented. Meekers et al. (2003), in their study on the levels of sexual risk behaviors among urban young Cameroonians, found that the very first intercourse often occurs at an early age and that a substantial fraction of youth, particularly males, show high rates of partner change. The use of mobile phones facilitated the transactional sex and increased the rates of partner change, especially as many young people now are on Facebook. The normality of transactional sex in the eyes young people and its acknowledgement in mainstream Cameroonian culture, support Hattori et al.'s (2008)

findings on the inability of girls to refuse sexual intercourse within their relationship, particularly within the relationships with men who offer to pay their school fees, a position that gives these men power over the girl in question.

#### **4.8. Mobile phone usage in urban life: Public health implication**

This study is about mobile phone usage in an urban setting and mobile phones, according to Townsend (2000:1), “have a profound effect on our cities as they are woven into the daily routines of urban inhabitants.” Besides, urban life has been a key concern in anthropological research and because of this concern, anthropologists may consider the relation between the sexual behaviors influenced by the use of mobile phones and health. Cities like Yaoundé are big and consequently it is costly for people to meet or socialize as distances are great. For instance, people need to pay taxis and spend several hours in order to meet each other, including sexual partners. However, new communication technology has efficiently replaced these hindering factors as time and cost. Whereas previously, according to Geser (2005), physical proximity was a precondition for humans to initiate and maintain interactive social ties, nowadays new communication technologies re-configure these preconditions by bridging distances (Marvin 2013) through social networking. Yet, mobile phones' potential to facilitate social networking in big cities also contributes in facilitating sexual activities and their ensuing risk behavior which has implications for the reproductive health young people.

Sexual risk behaviors facilitated by communication technologies as experienced in contemporary youth culture, were non-existent “about six thousand years ago when cities were unknown,” according to Hunter and Whitten (2000:408), as global urbanization is almost exclusively a phenomenon of the present century. Today, anthropological urban studies pay attention to city dwellers and focus on urban cultural differences (Hunter and Whitten 2000:413). Mobile phone usage and its impact on young people’s sexual health deserves anthropological attention, and should involve the emerging processes of social and cultural interaction in an urban context compared to those found in small-scale, traditional communities (Hunter and Whitten 2000:419). One way through which this study focused on these social and cultural interactions in urban context, is by analyzing the mediated courtship initiation among people in night life economy, in this case the Djeuga and Katios nightclubs. The fact that such nightclubs are not common in small-scale, traditional communities brings out the differences in social interactions between cities and villages.

Yaoundé's city stature is socially diverse, both in activities, including sexual activities, and in spaces of sociability, as shopping centers, bars, leisure parks, nightclubs, and cinemas. This wide range of possibilities seems to wield a powerful attraction to Yaoundé residents, and makes them depend less on tradition as (1) a guide to thought and conduct (Hunter and Whitten (2000:419) and (2) a regulator of sexual relations and practices (Oppong and Kalipeni (2004:52). In particular, the ubiquity of mobile phones appears to be contributing in the erosion of traditional ways of communication and of the age old structuring of social ties. Hunter and Whitten bemoan the reduced influence of traditional social control in the cities, and point out that this is reflected by the steady increase of socially disapproved behaviors. Hunter and Whitten's thesis on the erosion of ways that have for centuries contributed to control social behavior, is confirmed by the social disapproval by teachers and educators during my informal interviews in Yaoundé. These key informants expressed their dissatisfaction about mobile phones' role in sexuality among young people. They pointed out the use of communication technologies appears to be a must and an extension of urban life. The fact that mobile phone usage may facilitate sexual risk behaviors at the era of HIV/AIDS – with its devastating consequences – pushes these informants to conclude that it creates social and cultural panic.

#### **4.9. Proposing behavior change through prevention by mediated communication**

Both clinical and social advances in HIV treatment so far have proved that the best way to reduce HIV transmission is through behavioral intervention. Firstly, enormous efforts have been made by clinical experts to improve the quality of life of people living with HIV (PLWH), nevertheless, a HIV cure still appears to be a dream. Secondly, because of the difficulty to come up with an effective cure, it has become clear to health care policy makers that to halt the spread of HIV, behavior change is the ultimate solution. Thus, researchers lay emphasizes on changing what people do (for example having sex without condoms) as it are the determining factors of exposure to HIV infection. Mobile phones still appear to be recent among local Cameroonians, but – and more importantly – they might determine young people's exposure to sexual risk behavior.

Throughout this study, I argued that social goals are, in part, some of the determinants of flirtatious practices among young people in Yaoundé. But although the youngsters benefit

from the opportunities created by communication technologies to achieve these social goals, mobile phones can lead to risks almost unimaginable too. As young people are quite familiar with mediated social networking, future youth-oriented HIV prevention programs aiming a behavior-oriented change need to incorporate mobile phone usage. They should also include the issue of online sexual risk behavior. Such programs may emphasize text messages as the potential way to maintain trusted relationships between sexual partners instead as a way to handle infidelity, as I demonstrated in chapter 5.

Meanwhile, I cannot dismiss from my mind that due to young people's wish to accomplish social goals and their limited access to resources, they try out alternative ways and use the opportunities created by technology to achieve these social goals. I argue that some of these social goals involve the possession of unnecessary commodities promoted by trendsetters and consequently elevated to status symbols in youth culture. For example, the desire for young people to acquire the latest brand of phones, laptops, iPads, fashion, make-up and far more, leads to the application of all sorts of means, including risky and unnecessary pathways. Indeed, in order to increase one's status in the eyes of peers, a youngster easily turns to "gift for sex practices" to accomplish this goal. Yet, this particular goal (the desire to have a latest brand new phone) is in itself a result of the other goal, to boast one's status in the eyes of peers. As such, the three goals are inextricably entangled.

For young people, the desire to just possess brand new commodities to show-off, has implications when resources are limited. Sexual exchange then becomes the means through which to get what is needed and consequently to increase and maintain self-status among peers. Young people, contrary to adults, hardly acknowledge the risks that such unnecessary desires involve, because accomplishing these desires implies conforming to group norms and maintains their youth identities. Meanwhile, little is known on the association between limited resources to attain the things longed for as status symbols, and the risk involved in case the longed for things are only to be attained through a third party. Researchers have identified these longings and call them "self-produced modernity" (Cellik 2011, Gole 1996). There is an urgent need to identify this association in order to create behavior change, as the achievement of an increased status often depends upon gift for sex practices with all the risks it involves, as largely explored throughout this study. If what the youngsters want can only be provided by a third party – *in casual* sexual partners – then certain crucial choices to be made during the sexual activity (the use of condoms) depend upon the self-efficacy (agency) in sexual communication, which is in turn associated to the exercise of power. At this point,

power becomes a significant factor in sexual decision-making as it might either demolish or establish barriers to risk behaviors. Relationships based on intimacy are different, even though safe sex communication between intimate sexual partners can equally be hard. Yet, in any type of relation (casual, transactional, intimate), the self-perceived risk of HIV in the sexual negotiation process plays a most important role in safe sex outcomes.

Discourses on intimacy associated with mobile phone usage are now standard in sexual behavior research (see Weisskirch 2012, Drouin and Landgraff 2012). Considered as a crucial element of domestic life (Vetere and co-workers 2005), intimacy is currently incorporated into the mediated communication paradigm as a factor that accelerates and strengthens sexual partners' relationship circle. However, as young people in Yaoundé continue the search to achieve social goals, the bond with their intimate sexual partners weakens. In other words, due to the search to achieve their social goals, young people employ social media and create situations through which they are forced to involve in risk behavior such as having sex with older partners which consequently reduces their agency.

These social goals relate to what Swidler and Watkins (2007) call "ties of dependence instead ties of intimacy," in particular, the prevailing gift for sex practices. Watson and Swidler and Watkins also refer to this type of relationships as "patron-client ties." Swidler and Watkins add they are practices "where the moral obligation to support the needy becomes fundamental to African social life." Thus, to reduce situations in which young people are forced into risky sexual behavior, wider stakes are needed to create social awareness through sustainable techno-social behavior change. It is recommended to guide young people in matters of sexuality, and hereby use social media as a proxy to establish intimate sexual relationships and to avoid sexual risk behavior. Intimate sexual relationships need to be prescribed in Yaoundé schools, especially during moral education courses. As I mentioned in the introduction, the Cameroonian mobile phone service provider MTN was inspired by this awareness to establish its social program which offers its subscribers free calls between 10pm – 11pm to call their intimate sexual partner exclusively. The free calls are meant to avoid young people with limited resources to buy airtime credits to engage into sexual flirtation with others, or to avoid young people to receive airtime credit as a gift from a *mboma*. As such, MTN's social program tries to avoid casual sexual intercourse which aims to obtain credits, intercourse that is transactional and intergenerational and most vulnerable to HIV transmission.





## Chapter 5: Yaoundé data: Results and Analysis

This chapter presents the data we collected during our ethnographic fieldwork in Yaoundé, meant to test the validity of the study hypothesis. The data will be arranged along the different research sites. First, I will discuss our findings from the Yaoundé restaurants, then those we collected at the call boxes, next the high schools (students and staff) and finally the universities. For each site, I will present the data first, then the various methods that were used for collecting the data, and finally I present an analysis of the data.

### 5.1. Yaoundé's bar, nightclubs and restaurants

First, I will outline the participants' responses from the Green Valley Bar at the neighborhood of Bonas. As I stated more in detail in Chapter 2, more particularly in section 2.4.2.6.1. on our methodological procedures at this site, we took off with some informal interviews with the waitresses of this very bar. The first question I asked one them was why many of the customers of Green Valley Bar, the majority of whom are students, continuously display their phones, putting them in their pockets and then removing them again, even when they are not texting or calling. In the opinion of this waitress, students "like to show-off with the latest fashion of phones so they can believe their friends look up to them." Green Valley Bar – still according to this waitress – is not only a good place for showing off the latest phones, but also a good place for dating, as "indeed most people call it a *rendez-vous* spot."

After the waitress, we interacted with four participants, which we coded as V1 and V2 (males) and V3 and V4 (females), and with whom we enjoyed a drink. After complaining about the state of my phone's battery (which was an informal way to motivate these participants to talk about phones, again see section 2.4.2.6.1. in Chapter 2).

We collected additional data at Green Valley Bar, albeit without directly asking questions. More precisely, we joined some individuals and paid special attention while they were talking about sexuality. At one end of the bar, a woman was dwelling on in front of an audience of eight. She explained that, in a sexual relationship, the failure of one partner to text message or call the other, especially if this lasts for a long time, indicates a weak tie

between them. Others intervened and confirmed that not receiving calls or text messages shows that something is wrong in the relationship. As we joined the group who was having this discussion, additional arguments were expressed. For example, one male said that possessing a woman's phone number is like possessing the keys to her door. "If she refuses to give you her phone number, it means it is *you* who she is refusing," he said.

### **5.1.1. Analysis of the data from Green Valley Bar**

At Green Valley Bar, we first of all found evidence of mobile phone's pervasiveness in local lives, as almost everyone present had a mobile phone, which confirms the theory about the domestication and the cultural appropriation of mobile phone use in local cultures throughout sub-Saharan Africa. The device is deeply buried into the everyday life of the participants and impacts on their social relations in different ways; one of which is forcing the pace of dating and subsequently of setting up sexual activities too, as the case of participants V1, V2, V3 and V4 has shown. Also, the exchange of phone numbers or the refusal to do so, serves to communicate a particular message. As respondents stated, instead of saying yes or no to someone soliciting a sexual relationship, women prefer to either communicate their phone numbers or not to do so, indicating whether they accept the advances or not (see the answer of the participant who acknowledged that a phone number equals a key to enter a woman's house).

The waitress' answer about showing off the latest brand of phones confirms the assumption mentioned earlier that technological devices represent in themselves part of the material need which young people believe is required to increase their status. Several analyzes have been written on the use of mobile phones as symbol for social position, for instance by Ozcan and Kocak (2003) who investigated whether in Turkey, mobile phones' function as status symbol exceeded their function as useful appliance (e.g. for social comfort among family members, or for security reasons). Srivastava (2010) too, sees a mobile phone as a social tool because the device allows people to maintain their prestige and status. More significantly, Lycett and Dunbar (2002) have documented how males and females display their mobile phones in public places, especially in bars. The authors describe how men use their mobile phones to compete and as a "*lekking*" devices to increase their qualities in the eyes of females. Indeed, *lekking* is a term used by biologists to explain how mating (sex) takes place among animals. Some males (as in the case of birds) may have to fight and lose their feathers and consequently a means to display their male viability to attract a female.

Biologists who study these mating phenomena call it “sexual selection.” In the same way, young people (often males) show off with the latest brand of mobile phone (such as an iPhone) as *lekking* devices to display their worth and thus attract females. In addition, possessing an iPhone can be an indicator of men's wealth in the eyes of the females. Females on their part tend to engage in sexual relations with sugar daddies in exchange for similar devices as status symbols, which they use to in turn increase status their status in the eyes of their peers. The females may also use what they receive as gifts from the men during sexual relations to boast to their peers about the quality of the men they have a sexual relationship with. Consequently, a women who has a sexual relationship with a minister feels she has to possess a more sophisticated mobile phone than her peer having a sexual relationship with a person of lower rank (say a primary school teacher).

Also, the answers by V3 and V4 – who received their mobile phones as a Valentine's Day and as a birthday present respectively – shows that gifts are “specific techniques to reach specific goals,” as Scupin and Decorse (2005:305) put it. These gifts work in two ways, as there are two goals at play: to receive a phone on the one hand, and to receive sexual pleasure on the other. Therefore, to V3 and V4, creating ties with the men who promise them a mobile phone as a gift, is a specific technique to reach a specific goal (to receive the desired phone which in turn enables to rise status). Similarly, the men reach their goal as well, they receive the sexual encounter they had longed for. The findings above lay bare the transactional component of mobile phones, reminding the transactions that occur in commercial sex.

### **5.1.2. Djeuga and Katios nightclubs**

In the following paragraphs, I will present the ethnographic data which we collected during participant observation among youngsters who were enjoying nightlife at Djeuga and Katios nightclubs. Yaoundé, like many other cities in Cameroon, offers a vibrant “night liveliness,” and there is a myriad of places where people can go to at night to drink, eat and dance. Dancing takes place in many nightclubs, but the most famous ones are Djeuga and Katios. As soon as we arrived at Katios to begin with our participant observation, the first thing we noticed was the queuing of those waiting to pay the entrance fee. In this queue, we noticed a lot of talking through mobile phones, and the talks we intercepted suggested that nightlife was characterized by sexual flirtation. As we addressed one of the nightclubbers waiting outside the nightclub, coded Jos, he claimed: “I come to this nightclub to enjoy myself and dance and drink, but I am also interested in meeting beautiful girls.” His aim

while dancing, Jos continued to say, is to snatch a girl's phone number, "first I try to seduce her during dancing, then I make sure I smile and next I talk to her." This conversation shows how to succeed in getting a phone number is considered to be a positive sign, and that a sexual relationship might ensue. Similarly, his friend, coded Sam, said "whenever I enter the club, I realize I have just spent a lot of money to do so, therefore I don't take any chances but seek to compensate myself by dance, drinks and of course, by wooing a girl." When asked how he proceeds to woo a girl, Sam's answer ran: "I do not need to run after her, if I succeed in getting my hands on her phone number, I know I have got her already."

What informant Sam said is evidence of the new courtship ways current not only in Yaoundé, but in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Brinkman and co-workers (2009), who have been paying particular attention to acts of seduction in Sudan, state that mobile phones have become central strategic devices for courtship. The authors also stress that most parents nowadays buy mobile phones for their daughters in order to exert parental control, but ironically, these girls then use these received mobile phones to establish networking with those who admire them, obviously without their parents' consent. Furthermore, mobile phones facilitate the courting process. The use of a mobile phone dissolves inhibition and consequently offers sex-seeking individuals the opportunity to have the courage which they would normally lack while discussing sex-laden topics face-to-face. The curbing of inhibition through the use of a phone is similar to the inhibitory cues which social psychologists have previously documented on drinking, in particular on drinking combined with sexual risk behavior. Venable (2004) mentions how alcohol precipitates extreme behavior that would be unthinkable under non-alcohol circumstances. As such, the author emphasizes the role that alcohol plays in loosening inhibition, and pushing sexual partners to behave in a way they would hardly do when not under alcohol impairment. Similar to the consumption of alcohol, the use of a mobile phone fades out one's inhibition. Since the potential sexual partners are not talking face-to-face, they might find the courage to express their desire for a sexual encounter.

Inside the Katios nightclub, we also recorded data on the possession of two mobile phones to manage several sexual relationships at the same time. We noticed that extramarital men who came to the nightclub with young single girls would switch off the mobile phones which they use to communicate with their wives. In the same way, these young girls would switch off their mobile phones to avoid being contacted by their regular sexual partners. Usually, one of

the mobile phones is connected to the MTN provider, and the other to the Orange provider. Several anthropologists have analyzed these aspects of infidelity within marital or other sexual relationships. In her anthropological inquiry about mobile phone use in Mozambique, Armchambault (2009) focuses on the way a mobile phone brings about marital family feud. Women, especially married ones, can be sensitive to suspicious text messages and calls their husbands receive, and this may trigger heady arguments. Not only spouses, but non-marital young girls and boys who have additional sexual partners too, use the two phone strategy to avoid surveillance from one another. In the diagrams below, I demonstrate these strategies that sexual partners use to handle their infidel behavior, by representing the use of two phones, one with an MTN number, and another with an Orange number.

MTN numbers are those from the Mobile Telephone Network Company and these numbers begin with a 7 followed by seven additional digits:

Example MTN Number: 77777777

Orange numbers are those from the Orange Group Company and these numbers begin with a 9 followed by seven additional digits:

Example Orange Number: 99999999

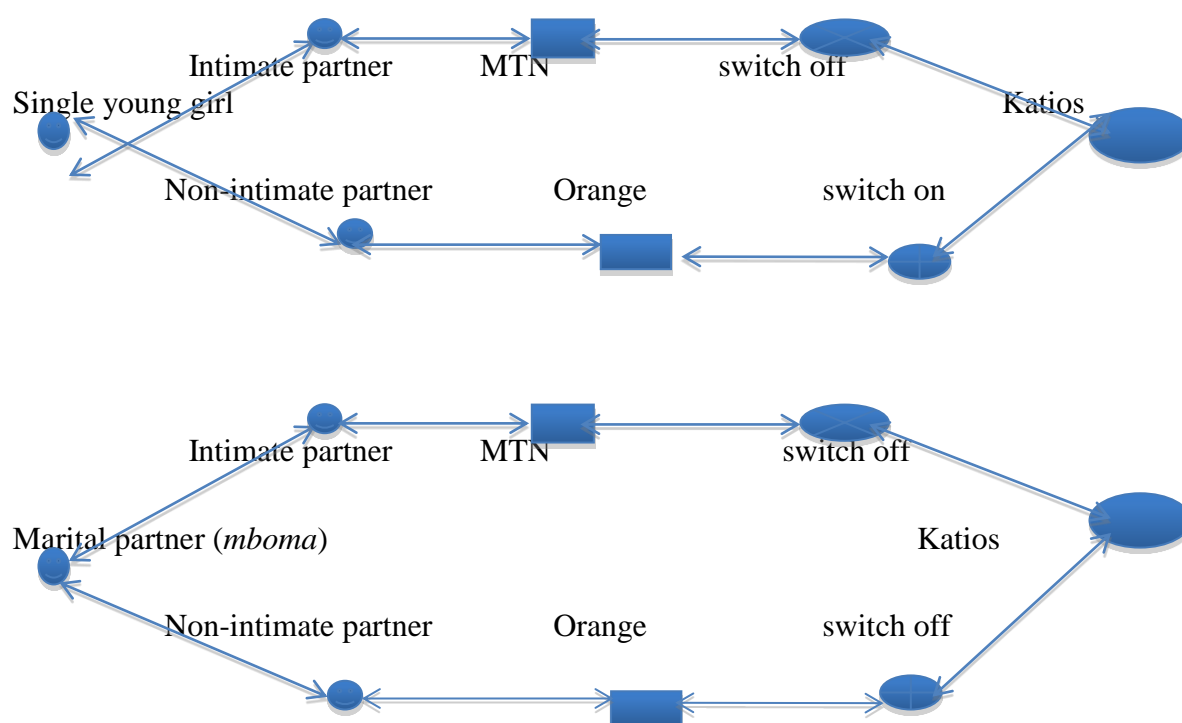


Figure 5: Example of two mobile phones use to cope with, and manage, multi-sexual relationships

Source: Fieldwork notes (2010)

The day after our observations at Katios, we went to the other nightclub, Djeuga. Outside this nightclub, we made informal interactions with a group of girls who had just arrived when suddenly the mobile phone of one of them rang. The girl, coded Gla, quickly moved a step away and said: "Hallo! Mr Solo, I am surprised that you are not here yet since you told me that we (plus her friends) would meet you at Djeuga by now." She paused and looked very angry, and then continued saying "look, it is not funny as I do not like to date men who are not serious. Indeed, I am surprised when you say you and your friend are still on the way. Please, if we do not see you in the next few minutes, then we will have to leave." She and her friends waited for a while and finally the men arrived and one of them, coded Dan – I supposed the one who had just called the girl – started to apologize. He said "Besides waiting for my friend K, I had to pick up my niece from Acacia to Cité Verte where I live. My wife travelled to Douala so my niece will be taking care of my two kids tonight." When I heard this, the first things that came to my mind were extra-marital sexual relationship and age mixing. As soon as the group of girls had entered the nightclub, I called colleague C4 to have him note what I had just observed. He wrote the following: "two married men in their late

forties, together with three university students in their twenties, who had mentioned they were studying at Yaoundé 2 University, using mediated communication to accomplish their dating appointments.”

During the next interaction, C4 tried to discern patterns of mediated communication leading to sexual risk behaviors, and started by asking nightclubbers whether it is wise to carry and use devices like mobile phones inside this nightclub. The answer by one coded Hans, was (while smiling): “Of course, you have to, if not why should I even pay to enter the nightclub. I come here for three things, to drink alcohol, to dance with girls and finally to involve in sexual relations with them.” As Hans carried two mobile phones, my colleague went on to ask if he was using the two phones at night and he replied that: “One, which is now switched off, has a MTN number reserved strictly for my *chérie* and the other, which is now on, is for adventure, that is for non-intimate sexual relationships.” Colleague C4 recorded this evidence of mobile phone use to manage multi-sexual relationships.

### **5.1.3. Data collected at restaurant Grassland resto**

In the following paragraphs, I will present an analysis of the data collected at Grassland resto. In the restaurant, we noticed that flirtatious strategies used by youngsters in order to snatch a free meal, and how this flirting may lead to sexual risk behavior, as it involves previously unconnected persons who were calling and texting to try and arrange a date. The first group we interacted with, comprised four girls. According to them, a date in restaurants with men who at the end pay the bill, is generally called an “attack,” since the girls themselves entice the men – who previously had shown an interest in them – to spend their money. Indeed, before the actual day of the attack, which takes place on the day of the date itself, the girls already received several phone calls from the man concerned, and at these occasions he had promised them to spend money on account of them. This kind of verbal promises expressed through the phone before the actual date, are what our research team calls “airtime rehearsal strategy,” in reference to the rehearsals during music or drama sessions, when a singer or actor undergoes a preparatory period before he/she finally comes out to sing or act in public. Similarly, to rehearse a relationship to us means that a person uses his or her mobile phone to get acquainted with the desired person first, since however the two persons recently did exchange phone numbers, they were previously not connected and thus knew little about each other. It’s all a matter of avoiding unpleasant surprises. So in brief, as soon as they have each other’s phone number, they talk through the phone in preparation of the face-to-face meeting

that they will arrange one day a date. During these phone calls, men in particular will try and show off, proving the desired women that they are capable of taking care of them. The term generally used in Yaoundé discourse to refer to the caring, is “to spoil.” The term entered colloquial language on sexuality all over Cameroon, and when someone talks about “spoiling” a girl or boy, Cameroonians immediately understand what this means. The one who spoils spends a lot of money on the person he or she eventually wants to have sexual intercourse with; the spoiler expects this to happen in return of the spoiling. It is imperative that the one who will spend money on the other (offering meals, paying for the entrance fee and the drinks at a nightclubs) pretends to be romantic while text messaging or calling, before as well as during the date. However, to “spoil” is not to “attack.” During the “attack,” as the term itself implies, young people push the one who wants to be intimate with them to spend his or her money carelessly, even though sex may not be exchanged in the end. Indeed, when the time comes to actually have sexual intercourse, the girls or boys often end up running away. Grassland resto is quite popular for this type of flirtatious behavior, and many young customers who want to enjoy a meal simply entice anyone who is interested in them to sponsor their dish, yet the sponsor may end up only paying the bill, and not having sex in the end. These young people use enticing dating signatures, especially text messages, as non-verbal cues to make *mbomas* “spoil” them.

In Grassland resto, we also noticed selective attitudes by the mobile phone users who were present, choosing which call to answer or which text message to reply to. Many customers did not answer their calls immediately when their phones rang. They took the time to identify the caller, which for us was again suggestive of infidelity and coping with several sexual partners. The phone of one informant rang, he looked at the numbers and said “Why is this woman disturbing me, I have an appointment with someone else so I cannot meet now. I do not even know why I did not switch-off this phone. Now that I do not pick up the call, she may be mad at me and that will soon trigger a conflict between us,” he said. “This is why it is important to have two mobile phones, but even when you have two, the failure to switch one of them off creates a problem,” he added.

## **5.2. Observational data on changing culture due to mobile phone use**

In this section, and to conclude the outline of our ethnographical data, I present the data we collected through observation and informal interviews among MTN and Orange mobile phone service providers. These call box owners sell airtime credit at the many call boxes



along the roadsides of Yaoundé, and customers can also use their phones in case they do not possess one themselves (see pictures of call boxes in Figure 6 below).

### **5.2.1. Beeping through mobile phones as a new form of greeting and experiencing sexuality**

The first practice we noticed during this particular observation, was the “beep practice.” To beep someone means to dial someone’s phone number, let the phone ring once or twice, and then cut the connection. To begin, I will argue, following observational evidence in Yaoundé, that for young people, beeping is not calling. It is simply a form of dialing to convey a certain message which friends, relatives or sexual partners know how to interpret. There can be two kinds of messages.

Firstly, a beep is a way of greeting, a very common practice among people who cannot afford to buy (much) airtime credit. As such, a beep allows one to say hallo to friends and family, even if one has no airtime credit at all. Some young people have the habit of buying airtime credits which they do not even intend to use for phone calls, only for beeping. Note that beeping is free, but one might lose a small amount of credit if the answering machine of the respondent is switched on. Furthermore, beeping abroad costs a very small amount of credit too. We noticed that these youngsters go for several months without buying airtime credits and would just reserve a modest amount of credit which they can use to beep, and this can last for a very long time.

Secondly, one beeps another person to make known that one wants to be called. The person who has been beeped, knows that this is a sign that the person who just beeped wants to talk over the phone without spending airtime credit him- or herself; *they* want to be called. They might beep their *mboma*, and the *mboma* will call back immediately after seeing the number of the missed phone call on the display.

In the following paragraphs, I present further details concerning the process of beeping, and explore how it affects the sexual experiences of Yaoundé’s youngster.

Beep has become a buzzword in mainstream Cameroonian culture. It is a new form of signaling someone what is expected, either to consider oneself greeted, or to consider oneself urged to call the beeper. Beeping is a transnational act as well, since this kind of mediated communication is common between family members in Cameroon and those in the diaspora.

Family members in the home country believe that those of the diaspora are wealthy and able to call them back as soon as they are beeped by a Cameroonian. Similarly, girls and boys whose sexual partners have travelled to Europe or to the USA practice beeping in order to be called back. In this case, they dial the number and let ring just once, since if the beeper is not acting very fast, the answering machine might be activated, and the beeper will lose a small amount of airtime credit.

But there is more than meets the eye. Beeping is not only common among young people and has become part of their youth culture, it also impinges upon their sexual habits. A young girl might beep a *mboma* whom she thinks has the resources to call her back immediately. Indeed, women expect that men spend money on them and thus call them back whenever they beep. Consequently, beeping is a way to check a potential *mboma*'s solvability.

We inquired about the reasons for beeping and interviewed, in an informal way, a few youngsters. Answers varied, and by means of illustration, we quote a girl coded Mrs. Beep, who said, "I cannot waste my credit to call a man who seeks a sexual relation with me. Instead, he has to call me using his money, because after all he is the one longing for me, so all I do is beep to make clear he has to phone me." According to Mrs. Beep, if the man does not call her back, she will delete his number because he would probably be a miser who cannot support her with material needs.

In the next section, I present how the mobile phone business has become a source of livelihood for many citizens of Yaoundé.

### **5.2.2. Mobile phone "call boxes" as emerging sources of livelihood**

Call boxes nicely illustrate the mobile telephony boom in Yaoundé, they pop up all over the city. Numerous street vendors own a call box and as such it has become a source of livelihood for many households. It is an easy way to make ends meet since to set up a call box needs little investment. The future call box owner buys two or three mobile phones, and then subscribes to one of the mobile telephone companies, MTN and Orange.



**Figure 6: Mobile phone call boxes along the street in Yaoundé**

Source: [www.generation3world.org](http://www.generation3world.org) and [www.jamna.net](http://www.jamna.net)

We interacted with call booth owners to get an idea about their opinions on the emerging mobile phone culture, and to find out how MTN and Orange had set off in Cameroon in the first place. A few informants said that the trade agreements of 1990 between Cameroon and Asia, especially China and Dubai, were a landmark to the mobile culture era in Cameroon. They added that both mobile telephone companies MTN and Orange had started under the colors of Cameroon Telecommunications (CAMTEL), paying the latter in order to use its infrastructure, and this cooperation was called “CAMTEL Mobile.” CAMTEL Mobile carried out a nation-wide publicity to promote the use of mobile phones, while they were waiting to develop their own infrastructure, which would later be operational under the names MTN and Orange. Through media (radio, TV and newspaper), CAMTEL Mobile created awareness of the possibilities of digital communication through mobile phone. Later on, MTN company rapidly extended its network, as much in urban as in rural areas. As MTN gained popularity at fast pace, Chinese businessmen started to set up electronic shops in Douala and in Yaoundé, selling mobile phones from brands as Ericson, Nokia, Motorola and Sony. Finally, the Orange group expanded its network alongside MTN, and soon gained a good section of the market.

It is from this period onwards that people started to develop the practices I mentioned previously, such as possessing two mobile phones, each with a different SIM card. The two

companies adopted a lease deal that would allow private individuals to operate their own phone booths. These call booth owners would buy a certain amount of airtime and retail it to their customers. Call booths offer credit transfer and cheap calls, including beep services. One mobile phone booth owner told us that most operators buy airtimes scratch cards from MTN and Orange (see sample in Figure 7 below) and resell them, while others simply buy soft credit which they transfer to their customers after payment.

We also inquired about the conditions to be fulfilled by future subscribers. One mobile phone booth owner claimed that, in order to be assigned a mobile phone number, one needs to present a national identity card and fill in a form. Important information required includes the name of the customer, his/her address, age and nationality. After completing the form, the customer receives a pack with a scratch card and a phone number. The customer is now connected. He or she can start to share the phone number amongst his/her social contacts. The social contact profile expands according to his/her interactions, and it includes sexual partners.

At this point, we come back to the usefulness of the call boxes in coping with relationships among youngsters. The call boxes are convenient for them to communicate with their sexual partners, since they offer the possibility to call at a minimum price or even to beep at no cost at all. To young people who have no airtime credit to communicate with a sexual partner, the easiest way to solve this problem is to go to a call box along the street. It suffices to pay as little as 50 francs to be connected, and this small amount allows for a brief conversation too. We also noticed that when young people can temporarily not be reached by phone, for instance because theirs is broken, they rush to a call box and settle with the owner so that his/her calls can be channeled through the call box.



Figure 7: Sample mobile phone (MTN) airtime credit

Power (1988) states that qualitative research is essentially concerned with observation and experience and pivotal to our understanding of the socio-behavioral aspects of HIV. Power

emphasizes that participant observation and ethnography occur when researchers, for example, are teasing and examining behavior nuances. Similarly, I have so far presented observational data that I gleaned through the participant observation method. We achieved this by participating in the daily life of the students, which were our main participants, to observe in what conditions they ordinarily meet and how they behave while meeting. At the neighborhoods of Bonas, Chateau and Obili, as well as in vicinity of Yaoundé 2 University – all of these being students’ common social spaces – we entered into conversations to discover, for example, how in the words of Kwaku Kyem and LeMarie (2006:11) “mobile phones have become status symbols and fashion accessories.”

### **5.3. Data results from focus group discussions in Yaoundé**

In this section, I present the qualitative data that our research team gathered during the focus group discussions at the three high schools. I remind the reader that at the high schools, we applied different proceedings than at the universities. In the former case, we organized focus group discussions during which we read aloud and discussed the 9 main questions of the questionnaire. At the universities however, both in Yaoundé and in Ghent, we usually handed questionnaires to the students, they filled them in without our presence, and we collected the completed questionnaires afterwards. Sometimes, the respondent concerned preferred to answer to the questions of the questionnaire orally, and in this case we completed the questionnaire with these responses ourselves.

In Yaoundé high schools, our research team organized 6 focus group discussions with 12 students each time. During these FGD sessions, we read aloud the questionnaire with 9 questions, listened to the students responses and wrote them down. Next, we improvised some questions inspired by the responses to the questions of the questionnaire. Below, I analyze the answers given by the students of the three high schools. If a student’s response is quoted, I put his or her code name between brackets. The questionnaire itself, as well as the totality of the answers given by the 72 students to these 9 main questions, are presented in detail in Annex 1.

	lower Mendong (12)	upper Mendong	lower LBA	upper LBA	lower Efoulan	upper Efoulan	TOTAL
<b>Do you have phone?</b>							
YES	12(6m)(6f)	12(6m)(6f)	12(6m)(6f)	12(6m)(6f)	12(6m)(6f)	12(6m)(6f)	<b>72 (36m)</b>
NO							
<b>Number of contacts?</b>							
0 to 10	2(2m)	2(2m)	4(2m)(2f)	4(2m)(2f)	6(3m)(3f)	7(2m)(5f)	<b>23 (13)</b>
11 to 20	2(1m)(1f)	5(1m)(4f)	4(2m)(2f)	5(2m)(3f)	5(3m)(2f)	2(2m)	<b>23 (11m)</b>
21 to 30		2(1m)(1f)	1(1f)				<b>3 (1m)</b>
more than 30	4(4f)		2(2f)				<b>6 (0m)</b>
do not know exactly	4(1m)(3f)	3(2m)(1f)	1(1m)	3(2m)(1f)	1(1f)	3(2m)(1f)	<b>15 (8m)</b>
<b>Gift of phone influences</b>							
YES	7(3m)(4f)	6(4m)(2f)	7(2m)(4f)	9(3m)(6f)	5(3m)(2f)	4(4f)	<b>38 (15m)</b>
POSSIBLY	5(3m)(2f)	6(2m)(4f)	5(3m)(2f)	3(3m)	6(3m)(3f)	8(6m)(2f)	<b>33 (20m)</b>
NO					1(1f)		<b>1 (0m)</b>
<b>Romantic sms</b>							
majority	6(6f)	6(6f)	6(6f)	6(6f)	6(6f)	6(6f)	<b>36 (0m)</b>
fifty-fifty			2(2m)				<b>2 (2m)</b>
minority	5(5m)	5(5m)	4(4m)	5(5m)	6(6m)	6(6m)	<b>31 (31m)</b>
rarely if ever	1(1m)			1(1m)			<b>2 (2m)</b>
do not know		1(1m)					<b>1 (1m)</b>
<b>Calls from admirer</b>							
always	2(2f)	1(1f)	2(2f)	1(1f)	2(2f)	5(5f)	<b>13 (0m)</b>
often	4(4f)	5(5f)	5(1m)(4f)	5(5f)	5(1m)(4f)	1(1f)	<b>25 (2m)</b>
sometimes	6(6m)	5(5m)	5(5m)	6(6m)	5(5m)	6(6m)	<b>33 (33m)</b>
rarely		1(1m)					<b>1 (1m)</b>
<b>Steady sexual partner?</b>							
YES	12(6m)(6f)	11(5m)(6f)	12(6m)(6f)	12(6m)(6f)	12(6m)(6f)	12(6m)(6f)	<b>71 (35m)</b>
SOMETIMES		1					<b>1</b>
NO							
<b>Non-steady sexual partner?</b>							
YES	8(3m)(5f)	10(5m)(5f)	12(6m)(6f)	8(5m)(3f)	10(6m)(4f)	11(6m)(5f)	<b>49 (31m)</b>
SOMETIMES	3(3m)	2(1m)(1f)		4(1m)(3f)	2(2f)	1(1f)	<b>12 (5m)</b>
NO	1(1f)						<b>1 (0m)</b>
<b>Communicate condoms?</b>							
IF NECESSARY	2(1m)(1f)		1(1f)		1(1f)		<b>4 (1m)</b>
SOMETIMES	9(5m)(4f)	12(6m)(6f)	11(6m)(5f)	12(6m)(6f)	11(6m)(5f)	12(6m)(6f)	<b>67 (35m)</b>
OFTEN	1(1f)						<b>1 (0m)</b>
NEVER							
<b>Gifts for seks?</b>							
ALWAYS	3(3f)	1(1f)	1(1f)	5(5f)	5(5f)	3(3f)	<b>18 (0m)</b>
OFTEN	3(1m)(2f)	4(1m)(3f)	6(6f)	1(1f)	2(2f)	1(1f)	<b>17 (2m)</b>
SOMETIMES	6(5m)(1f)	7(5m)(2)	5(5m)	6(6m)	5(5f)	8(6m)(2f)	<b>37 (28m)</b>
NEVER							

Table 6: Responses from high school students in Yaoundé

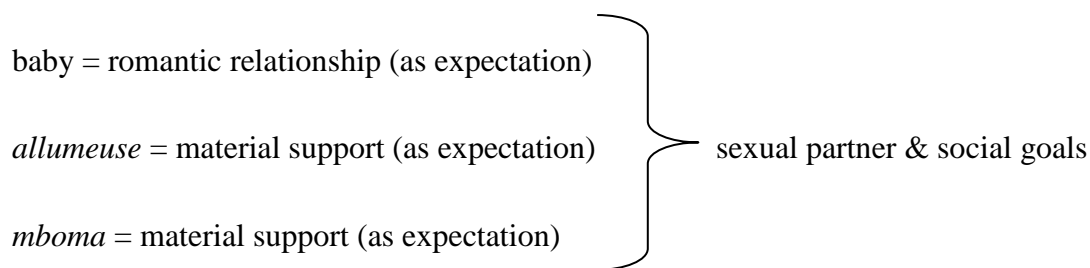
The very first question we read aloud to all students during the focus group discussions, was whether they possessed a mobile phone. Out of the 72 high school students who participated, 72 responded positively. Out of the 72 who indicated that they all have and use mobile phones, 4 stated possessing more than one. To Yaoundé's high school students, a mobile phone is a bare necessity. About 6 students explicitly expressed they *need* a phone, or "feel lost" (LLA (m)) without one. As many students stated they felt uncomfortable without their phones, calling it "my companion all the time" (ELO (m)). Others claimed they need a phone not to lose the connection with their friends, some stated they use it to surf the internet or check their Facebook profiles, again not to lose sight of their friends. Finally, as already mentioned above, 4 high school students stated to possess 2 or 3 phones. One student said he needed his 2 phones "for different purposes" (MLY (m)), whereas another referred to the 2 SIM cards of different providers he had put into his two phones (MUE (m)), without further explanation. As we had already clearly noticed during our participant observation at the nightclubs Katios and Djeuga, possessing 2 phones proved profitable to those who handle several relationships at a time. Some high school students referred to this strategy as well, as will be outlined below.

High school students not only *en masse* possess a phone, they (nearly) all have got a steady sexual partner too (71 out of 72). And on top of that, 49 students stated having a non-steady sexual partner as well, at the very same time that they were having a relationship with their steady one. Besides, 12 students stated they "sometimes" got involved with such an occasional lover. Note that more males pretended to currently have an additional non-steady partner (31 against 18 females), whereas slightly more girls than boys "often" had an occasionally non-steady partner (7 against 5 males).

The handling of different relationships at the same time, coincides with an unequivocal name giving in order to differ these sexual partners. One female participant (MLU(f)) stated that the nicknames "depend on who and how." Sexual partners who offer gifts in exchange of sex, are given other names than sexual partners who wish to start a committed relationship. As seen, elder men or women who offer gifts for sexual purposes are generally known as "*mbomas*." Other nicknames are "*allumeuse*" or "sponsor." The gifts from these non-steady sexual partners or sexual solicitors are expected to be expensive precisely because they are (or will eventually be) exchanged for sex and not for love. As such, the names of the non-steady sexual partners differ from the names given to those who

offer gifts for the sake of romance, gifts that are usually simple things like postcards, flowers or a photo album. These intimate sexual partners are called “*ma petite*” (if it is a girl), “*my chap*” (girl), “*ma chérie*” (girl), “*mon gar*” (boy) or “*my paddy*” (boy). Put in the words of one male participant: “I call my steady partner *honey* or *baby* and for any other relationship I just call the name of the partner, for example Janet” (MUY(m)).

These answers display young people's preference to categorize partner types. Longfield (2004) observed that in Abidjan, youngsters use about 79 different terms to nickname their sexual partners. Longfield puts forward that these names depend on what the young people expect from their various sexual partners. Longfield's sexual partner categorization among Abidjan youths inspires my study of sexual partners' name giving and the related expectations. For Yaoundé, I formulate following scheme:



Equation 1: Example of partner categories in relation to the three baseline social goals

From the above statements, we can conclude that all students have a mobile phone, that they all have a steady sexual partner, and that many of them have a non-steady sexual partner or a sexual solicitor at the very same time. Not surprisingly then, half of the high school participants (36) stated that the majority of the text messages they receive, contain an enticing message, in which the sender expresses the desire to get involved in sexual relations. Importantly, all of these 36 participants were girls. Male participants stated that only a minority of text messages they received, contained enticing words, and this was said by 31 males exclusively. Finally, only 2 participants claimed that they “rarely if ever” received enticing text messages, and these were 2 male informants.

To receive text messages, however, can rouse suspicion, depending on in whose company one is while receiving the message. Put in the words of one female respondent: “As



concerns text messages, I avoid them because they lead me into problems with my steady sexual partner, so from a non-steady partner, I prefer a call” (MLE (f)). One male respondent considers text messaging to be a practice reserved for the intimate partner exclusively: “Mobile phones are very sensitive in sexual relations nowadays, there it is important to be careful when texting messages because these messages can trigger a fight between sexual partners. Thus, I prefer sending messages to my steady partner only” (MLY(m)). The problem with text messages seems to be that they leave a trace, a written proof. One female respondent prefers to delete the messages to avoid suspicion and the ensuing problems: “I can text messages to my non-steady sexual partner but I make sure I delete them before meeting with my steady partner” (MUU (f)). Others opt for simply avoiding them: “I try as much as possible to avoid text messages because they lead to suspicion when you have several sexual partners” (MUE (m)). Another strategy to handle two different partners at the same time, is to possess two phones. Depending on in whose company one is, one phone might be switched off to avoid problems. “I have two mobile phones; so, when I am with my steady sexual partner I use one phone that she is familiar with and when I am with a non-steady sexual partner I don’t really care to switch on or off my phones because I consider the interaction as something casual” (MLY(m)). A female informant applied the opposite strategy: “I normally switch off when I am with a non-steady partner but when I am with my steady partner, I do not switch off my phone, instead I decline from answering any call except the one from my parents” (MLA(f)).

Besides the calls and text messages from their steady and their non-steady sexual partners, students also receive calls from those who long to have sexual relations with them, the sexual solicitor. When asked if it ever happened to them, all students responded positively. However, there is a huge gender discrepancy. To 13 respondents – exclusively girls – it happened “always.” Here, answering “always”, the students meant sexual partners who call them everyday contrary to answering “often” which the students meant sexual partners who call them frequently but not every day. From the 25 responded who “often” received such calls, 23 were females. Finally, to 33 students it occurred “sometimes,” and these respondents were exclusively males.

We also inquired about the amount of phone numbers from sexual partners the high school students have filed in their phones. It concerns both actual sexual partners, either steady or non-steady ones, and potential sexual partners, that is those who solicit sexual

relations. Most students saved less than 15 such contacts, and even though some stated they did not know the exact number but had “many” contacts (8 males), 6 claimed to have more than 30 phone numbers of sexual partners or solicitors (6 females). Female students relate having many contacts saved on their phones, to danger. Some female respondents expressed they feared having too many contacts might become a nuisance, especially if it concerns the contacts of those who do not belong to the immediate environment, as family and close friends. This is because they feel that having several contacts who try to solicit sex would also mean having to face the challenges of suspicion from their intimate partners. Moreover, some intimate partners even get jealous and this may trigger a fight and even leads to relationship termination. As one female participant stated “I would have had so many but I realized the danger of that so I have just about 10 contacts which are my relatives, friends and my boyfriend” (LLY(f)). Another female student was precise, stating that “I have realized that most people who know little or nothing about me and yet go about asking my phone number just want to have sex, thus, I avoid giving out my number to strangers or keeping theirs” (MLY(f)). To conclude, up until 30 such contacts filed, there is no significant gender difference, but it were exclusively females (6) who pretended to have more than 30 contacts of former or current sexual partners in their phone.

It is very common for those who make sexual advances through text messages or phone calls (so not the steady or the non-steady partner, but the sexual solicitor), to offer commodities to make their advances successful. When asked “Do you receive material support from people who solicit a sexual relation from you?”, not one student claimed it never happened, 18 stated communication through the phone from sexual solicitors “always” involves such offerings, 17 said “often,” and finally 37 said it “sometimes” did. In brief, solicitors do offer commodities to convince the one they crave for to finally give in. Gender disparity is obvious in this matter too, since the 18 participants whom were “always” offered gifts by sexual solicitors on the phone, were all girls. Finally, not one participant stated that the offering of a gift never happened to them.

It is clear that the promise of the gift of a sophisticated mobile phone influences the students decision to give in to the sexual advances. Out of the 72 students, 38 stated that it definitely pushes them to succumb to the sexual proposals, and 33 stated it possibly influenced their decision. Expressed in the words of a male student: “yes it is possible [that the gift of a sophisticated phone influences my decision] because it’s a gift and phones are

expensive yet people need them so badly that offering one can influence a sexual relation” (MLO(m)). Several students put forward that it depends upon the situation; as one female participant phrased it, “it depends on what the receiver wants and what he/she prefers” (MLU(f)). Only 1 student claimed a gift had no influence at all.

As we are researching the relationship between the use of phone, number of contacts filed and spread of HIV infection, during the focus group discussions at high schools, we also inquired about the communication about the use of condoms. It appears to be extremely inconsistent, as 67 students claimed they “sometimes” talk about the use of a condom with their sexual partners. Four students claimed they brought up the matter “if need be,” without further details. We suggest that this means that they will talk about the use of condoms if they are with a non-steady sexual partner whose former history is unknown to them. This also shows their perceived risk knowledge concerning people you only met recently, that is the strangers. Thus, their relative power or self-efficacy, according to Meekers and Klein (2002), increases during their encounters with strangers as compared to those people they know so well.

Communication about condoms and the related probability to use them during sexual intercourse, has been a major preoccupation by many researchers. Rickman and co-workers (1994) stated that adolescents who communicate with their sexual partners about each other’s sexual history, were more likely to use condoms during sexual intercourse. In another study, on condom use among adolescents in the Cameroonian city Edea<sup>47</sup>, Calves (1999) puts forward that one of the barriers for adolescents to negotiate the use of condoms, is the economic dependency which some sexual relationships involve (such is the case of young people’s dependency on *mbomas*). Luke (2003, 2005) analyzed how age categories and economic asymmetries limit young women’s power to negotiate safer sexual behavior, in Kenya (Luke 2003) and in the entire sub-Saharan Africa (Luke 2005). Other scholars proposed special youth-oriented HIV prevention programs. In particular, Meekers and Klein (2003) put forward that the government should create a youth-oriented program which incorporates parental support in the form of parent-child communication on condom use. Since there is evidence that young people’s relationship with *mbomas* who offer material support, creates a relation similar to what Swidler and Watkins (2007:147) call “ties of dependence.

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<sup>47</sup> Edea is a city that lies between Yaoundé and Douala.

Gifts by sexual solicitors appear in many kinds. The usual sophisticated phone is not the only commodity on offer. Indeed, the data from LBA convincingly show how the students of this school are exposed to numerous sexual solicitations offered in guise of rides. People driving by offer a lift to students passing in the streets, precisely because of the proximity of their school to the city center, where the pickups work. Hitching a lift saves the money one would spend on a taxi, and as such, can be considered a commodity, something with an exchange value. What the driver wants, is to snatch the phone number of the hitchhiker, as this female respondent states: “some of them even drive by intentionally in order to propose a ride and later ask phone numbers” (LLU (f)). These activities usually take place after school, that is at about 4pm, when the students head for their homes. The students are very much aware of the driver’s expectations, “sex-seeking people believe because of mobile phones they just need to run after you the first day because once they have your phone numbers, they will just call you and tell you what arrangements they have” (LLO(f)). They realize the reasons why the ride is proposed and the phone number asked, is “simply to arrange for dates and sexual intercourse” (LLA(f)).

Judged by the responses of the students to the improvised questions about this phenomenon, it are exclusively girls who are offered a ride. As one male explains, “for us the boys, women would hardly come to propose rides, in fact the girls are more familiar with these situations” (LLI (m)), which might be so because “these people also feel that young people, especially girls, like cars and when inside, the girls feel it's a kind of enjoyment” (LLA(m)). Another male added that “there are other ways that women (sugar mummies) who work in the ministries use to connect with young boys for a sexual relations, but giving a ride is definitely not one of their strategies” (LLO(m)). One of these other strategies, is the gift of an expensive phone, as stressed by the following quote, “older women who also want young boys as sexual partners often buy them a nicer phone better than the one the boys already had and afterwards spoil them with other gifts in order to have a sexual relation” (LUE(m)).

Not all the girls like to be addressed in this manner, that is, by being offered a ride, and one female respondent stated that “that is why sometimes I prefer to come to school without my phone, and when someone asks my number, I pretend that I don't know it by heart” (LUA(f)). However, not every girl declines the offer, as the colleague of the former student added, “I support what my friend has said, but if I am interested in the person, I may give my number instead of pretending not to know it” (LUE(f)).

Besides to hitch a lift, students are also offered to go shopping, “it is very common whenever we go to the center” (LUO(f)). This is an additional way to lay the hands on a phone number in the end. As one female student explained, “when schools are not effective such as in the weeks before 11<sup>th</sup> February<sup>48</sup>, we always go to downtown Yaoundé for some window-shopping and during such moments we encounter men who buy things for us and end up with our phone numbers” (LLA(f)). Once again, this is not really a strategy that a sugar mummy would employ, though it does happen. One male respondent explores the theme, “it is a bit uncommon for boys to encounter sugar mummies in the city center, to me, most women who want young boys for a sexual relation connect the boys either in a night club or in the neighborhood where the boy lives. It does not cancel the fact that a sugar mummy can be seen with a young boy in downtown, but often they had previously made the connection somewhere else” (LLU(m)).

Yet another commodity on offer to try and seduce a student, is the safari trip, as explained by the students at *Lycée d’Efoulan* during the improvised questions. The destinations of these trips are the beaches of Kribi or Limbe “because these two places are famous for beach leisure” (ELY(f)). And once more, the students appear very conscious of the expectations of the one who offers this gift, “whenever men take us to the beaches, we often have in mind that it is just leisure, but once we are there, one is tempted to quickly fall into a sexual relationship, faster than you expected” (ELY(f)). It is a prestigious destination, something special, something expensive that parents cannot afford, “of course many of us like to go to the beaches for leisure, but the places are far from Yaoundé and our parents would hardly pay for any trip. Therefore, only people who want a sexual relationship can take us there” (EUE(f)). It is a trip that enables to enhance one’s status, something to show off with, “going to the beaches is common nowadays because we like to go there to have fun and snap pictures which we put on our Facebook profiles, it is amazing when our friends in other places see these pictures and comment on them, yet, these trips are expensive and only *mbomas* can offer to sponsor them” (EUY(f)). It also helps to convince a potential sexual partner to give in, as the following male student relates: “There was a girl who came from a wealth family and was interested in me but I resisted her all the time; but when one day she told me she could take me to the beach, I changed my mind towards her. We went to the

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<sup>48</sup> Each year, Cameroon celebrates the 11th of February as a day for the youths. About two weeks prior to this event, classes are replaced by sports and cultural activities in preparation of this national holiday. As a result, those not eager to participate in these activities, are free to wander around in town. In the case of the LBA students, they head for the city centre, as their campus is close by.

beach and we started a sexual relationship there” (EUI(m)). During the safari trip itself, “mobile phones played a great role because when I was initially not interested in the girl, she kept on sending me text messages and calling. Sometimes she'll ask me to go online on Facebook only to show me pictures of others who have been enjoying life in Kribi and Limbe” (EUI(m)). After the trip, the receiver of the gift knows what is expected from him/her, and sexual relations may ensue.

As such, the data from the improvised questions at *Lycée d'Efoulan* introduced a new element in our study, a social goal not mentioned before: the safari trips to Limbe and Kribi. These trips are offered in exchange of sexual intercourse, and thus may involve sexual risk behavior. This kind of sexual risk behavior has been documented by researchers who focus on tourism. Hubson et al. (1998:503) have stressed that “one setting in which young people could contract HIV and STDs, is on a holiday,” since a vacation might induce acts of unprotected sex with new partners met during the brief stay. The students of *Lycée d'Efoulan* who accept to be taken to the beaches of Limbe and Kribi, see themselves as travelers. Following Hubson and his co-workers’ (1998) thesis, these students may be tempted to consume more alcohol than they would normally do when they are at their hometown Yaoundé, and consequently get involved in “irresponsible behavior [that] may be deemed acceptable” and thus making HIV infection possible.

#### **5.4. Data concerning discussions with specialized informants (high school staff)**

In this section, I present the data our research team collected during informal conversations with the staff members of the three high schools. As I mentioned in the introduction of Chapter 2 on methodology, we thought it might be insightful to interview the staff of these schools. We judged the teachers have specific knowledge concerning the impact of mobile phones amongst youths in Yaoundé, since they work among youngsters all of the time. As a result, we included these specialized informants in the participants of the high schools (see participants' composition in Table 4, Chapter 2).

The first staff members we had a meeting with, were those of *Lycée de Mendong*, and it concerned both history and philosophy teachers (coded H and P respectively). They shared with us their opinions concerning new patterns of mediated sexual culture among high school students.

The history teacher started by saying, “As a historian, I would like to say that things are changing in our society during recent decades, especially in terms of technology, culture and sexuality. Before 1990, little did I know I will ever rely on a mobile phone for my daily tasks and little did I even know that mobile telephone usage will become part of my everyday life. It really surprises me a lot that mobile phones have invaded the daily life of Cameroonians, especially young Cameroonians. Many of them cannot cope without their mobile phone.” H added a particular experience which he considered as a good example of mobile phone usage and changing culture. He said: “New communication technology, especially mobile phone usage, has become the new pathway of social life not only in Cameroon but in sub-Saharan Africa. It impacts all aspects of our social life, in terms of security, of social support and, for purposes of your research, I would say it impacts on sexuality too.” H went on to say that “indeed, husbands and wives today might experience some friction because of fishy text messages or suspicious calls.” In the same way, H has seen his female and male students nagging at their boy- and girlfriends over the phones, just because of some suspicious text message. The most tangible consequence, according to H, is that everyone has become very sensitive since the appearance of these new communication technology devices, as a text message at the wrong moment and with the wrong words, suffices to disrupt a relationship. “To be specific and for the sake of your inquiry,” H continued, “I would say that the role of mobile phones on sexuality among urban youths is something that needs attention. As an educator who does not only teach, but also has specific knowledge about youths and their social life, I may say that young people use mobile phones to have things that they do not get from their parents. And then I didn’t even mention the internet yet! It has even more social impact than mobile phones. For example, young people go to cyber cafes every day to chat on Facebook, and the majority of contacts they add each day are strangers who want to have sex with them. I may say all these interactions raise the issue of HIV transmission because I doubt if all these sexual activities involve protective sex.”

H’s message is clear: with the emergence of new communication technology, creating and maintaining sexual relations have become easy. In other words, he feels these devices have facilitated the pace of sexual activities, and the more people involve in sexual activities, the more likely an infectious disease is spread.

On his part, the philosophy teacher (P), started by thanking his colleague for recounting his experience of mobile phones, social connectivity and the impact on sexuality among young people. According to P, our society is on the move and on different rails, yet, many are still to acknowledge this. Indeed, elder people use their phone to discuss business or security matters exclusively, and are not aware that young people use these devices to talk about completely different things, about topics related to their emotional and sexual lives. P said: “Indeed, as my colleague said, things have changed a great deal; culture, society and technology. The way we grew up is very different from the way the current generation grows up. For example, my eldest son can’t just make it without a phone, and he forced me to buy a second hand laptop just because he wants to be connected with his friends on Facebook all the time. To go straight away to your inquiry, I fully agree that mobile phones play a role in sexual experiences in Cameroon, and as a philosopher, I keep thinking and predicting how the future will be for young people’s sexual and reproductive health. Among many other things, I feel that the patterns of social networking have changed and mobile phones impact the pace of sexual activities, which might lead to sexual risk behaviors. With the emergence of mobile telephony and internet, the frequency of sexual activities is, I guess, twice as fast as it used to be in 1980. I always try to imagine how, with technology taking a new shape every day, the lives and more specifically the healthcare of young people can be handled by 2025. I am saying this because this technology which is facilitating sexual relations, is doing so at the era of HIV/AIDS.”

Thus, according to P, mobile phones and internet connectivity are aspects that public health experts need to pay attention to, especially in relation to social patterns of HIV/AIDS transmission. We think that our study partially fills up this gap.

Next we met some staff members of LBA. Our first informant was a history teacher, coded H2. He said that mobile communication has become a well-established way to keep in touch with friends and family. According to H2, the incorporation of mobile phone into every aspects of our lives provides grounds for policy makers to consider the relationship between new communication technology and health. In particular, use of these devices triggers cultural processes that might lead to sexual risk behaviors among young people. As such, H2 confirmed what was previously said by both H and P.

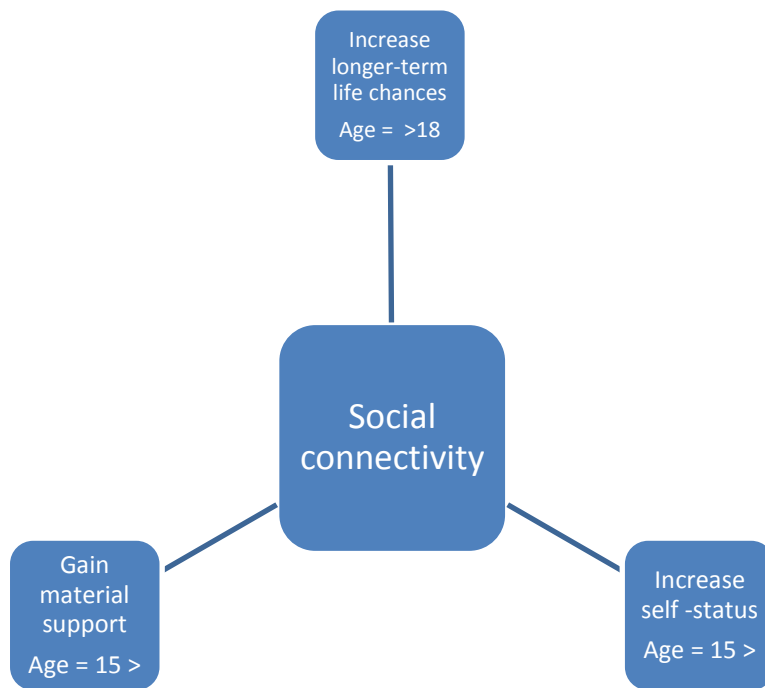
The next teacher was a philosophy teacher (coded P2), who also shared his opinion not only about mobile phone usage, but about cyber usage as well. According to P2,



chatting via Facebook, just as talking over a mobile phone, enables young people to talk about sexuality in ways they would not do in real life, since a mediated way of communication reduces inhibition. To him, one of the crucial ramifications of social media is the fact young people are now able to engage in sexual activity without much restraint; they can loosen up and express themselves without the knowledge of their parents.

Finally, I present the opinions of two teachers of *Lycée d'Efoulan*, one being a history teacher, coded H3, and the other a philosophy teacher, coded P3. The first teacher started by saying that “it is time we recognize the social impact of mobile phones, especially the sexual risk behaviors they create.” According to H3, we often underestimate the consequences of exchanging numbers, because as time goes on, the exchange of numbers allows to pursue relations which aftermath – that is, risk behavior – might have been avoided if the numbers had not been filed. H3 refers to the fact that some of these relationships end up creating huge risks in themselves, especially the risk to be vulnerable to an HIV infection. The second informant P3 endorsed that mobile phone usage has significantly changed social interaction. Due to this change, mobile phone’s impact on sexuality should not be neglected by researchers, by the government or by the policy makers. Mobile phones have a role to play, directly or indirectly, in young people’s sexual and reproductive health. This is so because mobile phone is hugely incorporated into the socio-cultural processes that put young people at risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

Following the results of the participants (students and staff) at the three high schools, I present two diagrams below (Figure 8 and Table 7) to confirm the primary hypothesis (creating social ties through mobile phones as means to achieve social goals).



**Figure 8: Social connectivity and social goals flow**

Source: Fieldwork data 2011

The three rectangles, namely: (1) at the top (increase longer-term life chances), (2) on the left (gain material support), (3) the right (increase self status) and the final (4) in the center (social connectivity) have the following explanations: (a) that (2) is a goal common for both high school and university students, (b) that (3) is also a goal common for both high school and university students, (c) that (1) is a goal that is not common for high school students as it is for university students and (d) that (4) displays how the three social goals further determine how individuals create their social networks. For example, university students, especially those in the final year, often feel that they will soon graduate and consequently face the challenges of unemployment. As a consequence, they start to focus on opportunities for longer-term life chances, such as marriage or emigration to Europe (to fall bush, see Frei 2011). As a result, longer-term social goals are mostly those of the students who are more than 18 years (>18) in age, and this explains why I place an emphasis on age in (1) above. On the contrary, (2) to gain material support, and (3) to increase self-status is a goal that is common among both high school and university students. They all get material

support, for example, in the form of gifts and they use these commodities in themselves as status symbols enabling to increase their status in the eyes of peers.

According, I use the analysis of Figure 8 to create Figure 9. In Table 8, I emphasize the social goals and age asymmetries, and these are in turn illustrated in Figure 9 by making the goals more concrete, and outlining the gifts as a TV, a computer and such. To increase longer-term life chances, the gift might involve the promise to buy an air ticket to Europe after the studies are completed, or to help get a job after the first degree is obtained. As for increasing self-status, these are related to gifts as mobile phones and laptops which are portable. Indeed, commodities as a TV which are not portable allow to boast with only if friends come to your home and admire them, whereas mobile phones, for example, can be taken anywhere, to bars, restaurants and night clubs, and enable to reach a larger audience to show off to. Nonetheless, we should note here that since all students have mobile phones, only latest fashions can be used to boast with. These devices however (for example the model Samsung Galaxy S5), are expensive and can often only be reached through sexual partners who can afford to buy them, and demand sexual intercourse in exchange.

	Social goals	Age	Social goal items
Social connectivity	Gain material support	16 – 18 for high schools students 18 > for university students	TV, Computer, Mobile phone, clothing
	Increase longer-term life chances	18 > only for university students	A job after first degree, travel assistance (airticket)
	Increase or gain self-status	15 – 18 for high schools students 18 > for university students	Mobile phones, Laptop, Latest style

**Figure 9: Participants' age and social connectivity/social goals differences**

Source: Fieldwork data 2011

## 5.5. Data results from questionnaires at Yaoundé 1 & Yaoundé 2

### Universities

This section presents the participants' responses to the questionnaire survey at Yaoundé 1 University (18 – 24 years and  $n = 151$ ). I have already mentioned in the methods section, the research questions were classified under broad themes such as MPASNS (Mobile Phone As Social Network Service) and FM (Friendship Mapping). Firstly, I used the Stata 12 software to establish the association between the number of social contacts (totality of present and former steady sexual partners, non-steady sexual partners and sexual solicitors = social connectivity profile), coded as MPASNS2 (i.e. independent variable), and the number of sexual life partners (the number of people the respondent ever had sex with), coded as FM8 (i.e. dependent variable). The p-value was 0.003 proving that there is significant association between the number of social contacts and sexual life partners.

	FM8					
MPASNS2	1	2	3	4	5	Total
1	18	29	14	18	14	93
2	25	8	9	4	12	58
Total	43	37	23	22	26	151
Fisher's exact 'P' =				0.003		

**Table 7: Prediction the association between connectivity and sexual life partners**

In the next step, considering that there is a significant association between the social connectivity profile and the number of sexual life partners, I moved further to classify participants into risk groups based on their responses on MPASNS2 and FM8. The result of this classification is presented in the Table 8 below. The number of social (meaning partners type 1,2 and 3, so the solicitors included) and sexual contacts (meaning partners type 1 and 2, so the solicitors not included) was rated on a scale as follows:

MPASNS2 = number of contacts type 1, 2 and 3 filed in phones:

\* <10 social contacts;

\* +10 < 20 social contacts;

\* +20 < 30;

\* and +30 > social contacts.

FM8 = number people the respondent has ever had sex with:

\* 0 sexual life partners;

\* <5 sexual life partners;

\* < 10 life sexual partners;

\* and + 10 > life sexual partners.

In the table below, I abbreviate social contacts as “SC” and sexual life partners as “SLP.”

MPASNS/FM8	Respondents	% Respondents	Risk group frequency
<10 SC/ 0SLP	23	15.23 %	Low risk group (LRG)
+10<20SC/<5 SLP	63	41.72%	Medium risk group (MRG)
+20<30SC/+5<10 SLP	26	17.21%	High risk group (HRG)
+30>SC/+10>SLP	27	17.88%	<u>Very high risk behavior (VHRG)</u>
NEUTRAL	12	7.94%	<del>Neutral group<sup>49</sup></del>

Table 8: RSB & social connectivity matrix

Based upon their responses, in Table 8, I adopted the following linkage matrix to categorize the respondents in four groups, according to social connectivity and sexual activity: (1) respondents belonging to the Low Risk Group (LRG) had less than 10 social contacts filed on

<sup>49</sup> The neutral group here refers to the group of participants who gave no answers and this is why I put in red. In other words they are a "no answer" group.

their phones, and never have had sexual intercourse (so the social contacts they had filed, consisted of phone numbers from sexual solicitors exclusively), (2) respondents belonging to the Medium Risk Group (MRG) had between 10 and 20 social contacts filed, and had more than 5 life sexual partners, (3) those of the High Risk Group (HRG) had between 10 and 30 social contacts and between 5 and 10 life sexual partners, and finally (4) the respondents of the Very High Risk Group (VHRG) who had more than 30 social contacts and more than 10 life sexual partners. I used social connectivity as the independent variable, and the number of life sexual partners as dependent variables to determine the level of risk behavior (low, medium, high or very high).

From the table above, it is clear that 139 (92.05%) of the 151 participants can be classified under one of the four groups of risk behaviors. Therefore, I have reclassified the risk groups, and at this point the percentage scale changes accordingly as follows (note that I have now also inserted the gender of the participants):

RSB (group)	Nr of participants	%	Nr of SC and SLP
LRG	23 (4m/19fm)	16.54 %	<10 SC, 0 SLP
MRG	63 (25m/38fm)	45.32%	+10 <20 SC/<5 SLP
HRG	26 (8m/18fm)	18.70%	+20 <30 SC/+5 <10 SLP
VHRG	27 (14m/13fm)	19.42%	+30> SC/+10> SLP
<b>4</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>///</b>	<b>///</b>

**Table 9: Prediction of SCs and SLPs in the four RSB groups**

### 5.5.1. Social connectivity and safe sex communication

From Table 9, participants in three groups, namely MRG, HRG and VHRG indicate having more sexual partners as the number of those who tried to solicit a sexual relation with increases. Note that respondents of the LRG have never had a sexual partner. Consequently, 116 respondents (76.82%), that is those MRG (63), HRG (26) and VHRG (27) = 116 out of a total of (n=151) may be at risk for HIV infection, of which 47 males, and 69 females. The

risk of this population will depend on the barriers to condoms use that are current among them. To measure their probability to use condoms, I inquired about their communication about safe sex, as scholarly literature suggests that it determines the likelihood of using condoms. Researchers as Alder and Tschann (1997) and Wildman and co-workers (2006) claim that communication about condoms or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) determines the likelihood for young people to use contraception, and to practice a positive attitude toward discussing safe sex. Inspired by this approach of sexual communication and the likelihood for safer sex, I use the baseline “condom use communication preference” to predict the participants’ likelihood to use condoms. The baseline opinions concerning sexual communication preference included: YES, NO, SOMETIMES, and NEUTRAL.

<b>Likely to communicate about condoms with friends</b>				
Group	Yes	No	Sometimes	Neutral
LRG	0	11	2	10
MRG	7	19	31	6
HRG	0	7	12	7
VHRG	5	6	9	6
<b>Likely to communicate about condoms with sexual partners</b>				
Group	Yes	No	Sometimes	Neutral
LRG	0	0	0	19
MRG	6	33	10	14
HRG	6	7	13	0
VHRG	3	2	13	9
<b>Likely to advice friends to use condoms</b>				
LRG	3	2	18	0
MRG	15	7	25	16
HRG	7	7	8	4
VHRG	6	10	11	0
<b>Do friends advice you on the use of condoms</b>				
LRG	10	3	3	7
MRG	10	3	40	10
HRG	9	11	1	5
VHRG	6	10	7	3

**Table 10: Prediction of RSB within the four RSB groups**

In Table 10, self-report data on the sexual communication preference indicate that the majority of participants do communicate about safe sex, but that communication is inconsistent. Distinctively, inconsistent communication was assessed from a self-report scale

on either YES, NO or SOMETIMES. The latter itself is similar to “not being consistent,” and it was the response which participants indicated most. This inconsistency notion is persistent with previous findings concerning inconsistent use of condoms. In particular, as I have mentioned in chapter 1 (literature review), Meekers and Klein (2002) conducted a survey on the determinants of condom use among young people in urban Cameroon. They concluded that although young people reported using condoms, their use was inconsistent. Furthermore, evidence of self-efficacy, among others, as key determinants of condom use is associated with the sexual communication preference I try to predict. The possibility that young people can use condoms and thus for exercising self-efficacy with sexual partners can be (in part) due to their ability to communicate.

From a scale of opinion analysis, the following scaling (percentages) were analyzed concerning the first research question presented in Table 10 above (research question YSC3: Do you communicate about condoms with your friends?): to this question, the participants of the MRG stand out as 31(19.53%) of them stated that they *sometimes* communicated about condoms with their friends, while 19 (11.97%) said no. Another 7 (4.41%) said they communicate about the use of condoms with friends. For HRG, out of a total of 26 participants who fall under this group, 12 (3.12%) said they *sometimes* communicate about the use of condoms, then 7 (1.82%) said they do not communicate about the use of condoms with friends and none indicated a yes to communication about the use of condom with friends. In the VHRG, 9 (1.89%) said they *sometimes* communicate about the use of condoms with friends and 6 (1.61%) said no to communication about the use of condoms. Another 5 (1.35%) said yes they do communicate about the use of condoms with friends.

#### Aggregate (confirmation):

Out of 139 participants (that is the number of participants who exclusively answered questions, that is not being neutral) for LRG, MRG, HRG and VHRG) an aggregate of 45 (62.55%) participants *sometimes* communicate about the use of condoms with friends. An aggregate of 43 (59.67%) of the participants also do not like to communicate about condoms. In the first aggregate scale participants say *sometimes* showing that they do communicate about the use of condoms but communicative practices are rather inconsistent.

Another response scale was used to assess communication about condoms with sexual partners (research question YSC5: Do you communicate about condoms with your sexual



partners?) and yielded following percentage rates: Among the MRG, 10 (6.30%), that is out of the total number of 63 in MRG said they *sometimes* communicate about the use of condoms with sexual partners. On the contrary, 33 (20.76%) said no to sexual communication about the use of condoms with sexual partners and only (3.78%) said yes to communication about the use of condoms with sexual partners. In the HRG, 13 (8.19%) of the participants said *sometimes* they communicate about the use of condoms with sexual partners, 7 (4.41%) said no they do not communicate about the use of condom with sexual partners and 6 (3.78%) said yes to communication with sexual partners about the use of condoms.

#### Aggregate (confirmation):

Out of 139 participants from the LRG, MRG, HRG and VHRG groups, an aggregate of 36 (50.4%) *sometimes* communicate about the use of condom with sexual partners. survey, specifically about those who like to discuss about condoms, only an aggregate 15 (10.79%) like to communicate with sexual partners about condom use. An aggregate 42 (30.21%) of the participants do not like to communicate about condoms. Another 36 (25.89%) aggregate communicate sometimes, that is they do communicate about condoms but communicative practice is also inconsistent. About 42 (30.21%) are neutral.

Communication about safer sex, especially advice, by friends comprised peer support for social control. Asked about their opinions to advice friends (peers) about condom use (research question YCS6: Do you like to advice friends to use condoms?), the following scale report data were analyzed:

#### Aggregate (confirmation):

Out of 139 participants from LRG, MRG, HRG and VHRG on a scaling report in sexual communication survey, specifically about those who like to discuss about condoms, only an aggregate 31 (22.30%) like to communicate. An aggregate 31 (43.08%) of the participants do not like to communicate about condoms. Another 52 (72.28%) aggregate communicate *sometimes*, that is they do communicate about condoms but communicative practice is inconsistent. Another 20 (14,38%) was neutral.

In the final scale report, the aim was to assess if participants adhere and believe in peers for behavior regulation approval (research question YCS7: Do friends advice you on

the use of condoms?). If they do, then friends can rely on outcome expectancies of peer support, especially on safer sex.

#### Aggregate (confirmation):

Out of 139 participants from LRG, MRG, HRG and VHRG on the communication about the use of condom survey, only an aggregate 35 (48.65%) like to communicate. An aggregate 27 (37.53%) of the participants do not like to communicate about condoms. Another 51 (70.89%) aggregate communicate sometimes, that is they do communicate about condoms but communicative practice is inconsistent. Another 25 (34.75%) remained neutral.

#### DISCUSSION:

As theorized by Alder et al. (1997) which I mentioned above, communication about condoms or sexually transmitted diseases determines the likelihood for young people to have safe sex. Furthermore, Colleen and co-workers (2000) have highlighted that the communication with sexual partners about the safe sex options are the initial steps in any sexual relation. However, this thesis appears hard to sustain when the above data, especially the aggregate scores, show that the majority of participants only communicate about condoms from time to time. First of all, from the pragmatist point of view, the word “sometimes” may practically refer to “inconsistently.” From this we deduce that participants have been occasionally using condoms, but that their use is not consistent. Nevertheless, we are aware that for some respondents, an inconsistent communication does not preclude consistent use, so our analysis here cannot be conclusive.

### 5.5.2. Assessing background profile to predict social connectivity

BI1	Age:	(A) Under 18	(B) 18 – 25	(C) Above 25
BI2	Gender:	(A) Male	(B) Female	
BI3	Institution:	(A) UNYAO1	(B) UNYAO2	
BI4	Nationality:	(A) Cameroon	(B) Other	
BI5	Religion:	(A) None	(B) Christianity	(C) Islam
BI6	Ethnic group:	(A) Beti	(B) Bassa/Douala	(C) Bamileke
BI7	Parents' profession	(A) Business	(B) Farmer	(C) Civil servant

Table 11: Demonstrating participants' demographic background variables

Background profile, especially parental occupation, we thought, could be an issue for young people's social connectivity and could influence their "gift for sex practices." To test this specific hypothesis, we adjusted the initial four groups for parents' occupational background. To accomplish this adjustment, we employed the codes BI7 (see Table 11) and MPASNS4 to survey the association between social background and social connectivity in influencing "gift for sex" habits.

Before going any further, I wish to explain what the code MPASNS4 comprises (see also Annex 2 for a sample of the entire questionnaire). The code stands for the following question: Offering you a gift can influence your attitude towards someone trying to have a sexual relationship with you." Possible answers were TRUE or FALSE. The results of this item are represented in Table 12 below.

Traditional background					
Group	Farming	True	False	%True	%False
LRG	3	3	0	13.04%	0%
MRG	16	8	8	12.69%	12.69%
HRG	14	9	5	34.61%	19.23%
VHRG	17	11	6	40.74%	22.22%
Modern background					
Group	Business	True	False	%True	%False
LRG	8	3	2	13.04%	8.69%
MRG	26	11	15	17.46%	23.8%
HRG	6	1	5	3.84%	19.23%
VHRG	5	1	4	3.7%	14.81%

Modern background					
Group	Civil	True	False	% True	% False
LRG	14	6	8	26.08%	34.78%
MRG	19	9	10	24.28%	15.73%
HRG	4	2	2	7.69%	7.69%
VHRG	5	2	3	7.4%	11.11%

**Table 12: Demonstrating participants' background variables**

Note that from all respondents who filled in their parents' background (137 in total), 50 respondents had parents that were farmers, 45 respondents had parents that were in business, and 42 had parents that were civil servants.

#### ***5.5.2.1. Farmer background of parents and risky sexual behavior***

Firstly, 3 out of 23 participants whose parents are farmers, belonged to the Low Risk Group, that is they never had a sexual partner and have less than 10 social contacts on their mobile phones. These 3 (13.04%) reported that offering a gift will influence their attitudes towards a sexual solicitor. Another 16 belonged to the Medium Risk Group, as they had had more than sexual life partners and between 10, and 20 social contacts. When asked about a gift to influence attitudes towards a sex, 8 (12.69%) of them said yes and 8 (12.69%) said no. Of 14 respondents belonging to the High Risk Group, 9 (34.61%) said yes and 5 (19.23%) said no when asked whether a the gift could influence their attitudes to accept a sexual relationship. Out of 17 who said they had more than 30 social contacts and more than 10 sexual life partners (thus belonging to the Very High Risk Group), 11 (40.74%) said true and 6 (22.22%) said false.

I should add to these data that farmers enjoy the lowest income among working people in Cameroon. Children of farmers with a rural background often need to rely on wealthy uncles and aunts who live and work in places like Yaoundé to be able to go to university. In turn, these uncles and aunts must have benefited from the financial support of their the nephews' and nieces' parents while they went to Yaoundé to study. As a result, when their nieces and nephews enter the university, they contribute hugely in satisfying the needs a university education involves. Such generosity from uncles and aunts characterize the values of kinship and reciprocity in many African extended families. However, many students whose parents are farmers do come to Yaoundé without support from uncles and aunts. These particular students are more likely to engage in alternative activities in order to meet their

needs, one of these activities being to create contacts around town. Thus, participants from this rural and farmer background are more likely to intentionally share their mobile phone numbers in cases where they should rather have refused to do so. These students often grow up in the belief that in order to complete studies, the only option is to engage in survival sex, receiving modest gifts from *mbomas* in exchange for sexual intercourse.

#### **5.5.2.2. Business background and risky sexual behavior**

For participants whose parents are in business, out of the 5 belonging to the Low Risk Group, 3 (13.04%) reported that offering a gift will influence their attitudes towards a sexual partner. The other 2 (8.69%) ticked off FALSE. Out of the 26 participants from the Medium Risk Group, 11 (17.46%) said true and 11 (23.80%) said false. Out of the 6 belonging to the High Risk Group, 1 (3.70%) said true and 5 (19.23%) said false. Finally, out of the 5 belonging to the Very High Risk Group, 1 (3.70%) said true and 5 (14.81%) said false. In contrast farmers who earn low income, those in business in Cameroon often have the opportunity to flourish quickly and become wealthy. Consequently, a good number of students whose parents are involved in business fare well socially as compared to those from farmers. Furthermore, such students whose parents are in business get most of the things they need from their parents' resources and consequently refrain from sexual risk behaviors meant to have things they need. Nonetheless, they may still engage in such activities but the likelihood is that they just want to supplement what their parents provided in enough. This is possible if we look at the aggregate of the participants from this background who said "false" to gift and sexuality as compared to those in the farming background.

#### **5.5.2.3. Civil service background and risky sexual behavior**

From the 42 participants whose parents are civil servants and belonging to the Low Risk Group, 14 (26.08%) of them reported that offering a gift will influence their attitudes towards a sexual partner compared to 8 (34.78%) who said false. Of the 19 participants belonging to the Medium Risk Group, 9 (14.28%) of them said true and 10 (15.73%) said false. Out of the 4 who belonged to the High Risk Group, 2 (7.69%) said true and 2 (7.69%) said false. And finally, out of 5 participants of the Very High Risk Group, 2 (7.40%) said yes and 3 (11.11%) said no. In this section, I will like to emphasize that students whose parents are civil servants do not only have advantage of more family resources that may contribute in their avoidance of sexual risk behaviors (especially due material support) but also have the advantage of

growing up in a more socially-controlled environment. For example, children to teachers in Cameroon are more likely to grow up under a better social control than those from farmers. This is because parents who are teachers are the same people who mostly teach students about morals in schools. Therefore, they use their social regulatory talents to socialize their children even around matters concerning sexuality.

## **5.6. Social connectivity in function of risk group**

This brings us to a final variable lying at the core of our study, connecting mobile phone use to social connectivity and this in turn to sexuality. To assess the association between social connectivity and risk, I considered another scale of analysis, namely text messages received per day from sex soliciting individuals and those that actually express intimacy (that is, romantic sms). In particular, I paid attention to messages received per day and those messages expressing intimacy within the four risk groups to contrast the degree of perceived risk between them in terms of social connectivity. I move ahead to use the following questions (from Annex 3) to explore the associations:

Question MPASNS3: *Among the list of contacts in MPASNS2, how many send you an sms daily ? (A) 1-5 (B) 6-10 (C) 11 or more*

On this question, out of the 23 participants in the LRG, 18 said 1-5 contacts send them sms each day and only 5 said they received even more, that is 6-10 sms per day.

Question MPASNS5: *Among the sms you receive per day, how many messages are expressing romantic feelings? (A) The majority (B) About fifty fifty (C) The minority (D) Rarely if ever*

The same participants of LRG were asked in an opinion analysis to respond on how many contacts send sms that express romantic feelings. The very 18 participants who mentioned that only about 1-5 contacts send them sms each day, said if they did ever receive sms, only in rare cases will these sms express romantic feelings. The 5 who indicated receiving about 6-10 sms also said only a minority of these sms express romantic feelings.

For the MRG group, the following response rates were recorded: to question MPASNS3, 31 out of 63 (about 50% of the MRG group) said about 1-5 contacts send them sms each day, 18 said about 6-10 contacts send them sms each day and 14 said +11 > send

them sms each day. Still for MRG group, their responses to MPASNS5 were as follows: the majority (40) of them said only a minority of these contacts send sms expressing romantic feelings, 15 said the number of contacts sending sms expressing romantic feelings are about fifty-fifty and only 8 rarely if ever receive sms expressing romantic feelings.

The analysis becomes interesting if we draw the comparison with the two high risk groups. The HRG group exhibits much more social connectivity through mobile phone use than LRG and MRG. For the HRG group on MPASNS3, 17 participants indicated that they receive sms from 11 or more contacts, 5 indicated that they receive between 6 - 10 of such sms and 4 stated that they receive between 1-5 of such sms each day. Responding to MPASNS5, 18 of them said only a minority of the contacts send them sms expressing romantic feelings, 6 indicated that it is rare for them to receive sms expressing romantic feelings from the contacts and only 2 of them said the majority of the sms they receive from contacts express romantic feelings.

The very high risk group exhibits the same pattern as HRG, and this indeed in contrast with LRG and MRG. For the VHRG group on MPASNS3, 19 participants mentioned that they receive sms from 11 or more contacts, 6 of them stated that they receive between 6 - 10 of such sms and only 2 mentioned they receive 1-5 of such sms from the contacts. Yet, a similar trend we find across the population regarding question MPASNS5: 20 of the VHRG participants indicated that among the sms they receive each day, only a minority express romantic feelings, 7 of them indicated that it is rare to receive an sms expressing romantic feelings from contacts.

Analysis of the above results to contrast perceived risk in the four groups:

As the above results show, a significantly high number of LRG participants receive a very small amount of sms (that is 1-5) per day, and these sms rarely express romantic messages. Here, we have to take note that low risk mostly meant 0 sexual life partners (SLPs). This explains why they state the reception of sms expressing romantic feelings is rare. In the VHRG, out of 27 participants, 19 of them receive about 11 or more sms on a daily basis from social contacts who solicit sex, yet the number of sms expressing romantic feelings is very low. It is likely that this group represents the young people featuring centrally in our thesis, namely those that use mobile phones to gain material support in exchange for casual sex, hence those vulnerable to *mboma* gifts. Romantic sms in themselves as we know are to

express love and thus are most likely to be sent only by regular sexual partners, who in this case number hardly more than one.



## **Chapter 6: Cross-cultural comparative study (Ghent and Yaoundé)**

Since fieldwork in Ghent was limited to university students, in this chapter, I compare data from the universities of Ghent and Yaoundé exclusively, excluding the results of Yaoundé's high schools. I will outline my general conclusions – on high schools included – at the end of this study. The non-inclusion of high school data implies that this chapter focuses on young people between 18 – 24, and not on the younger ones.

Firstly, I present a cross-cultural comparison of the sexual risk behaviors among university students in Ghent with those in Yaoundé. The chapter is structured following domains of mobile phone usage: section 5.1. compares mobile phone usage at socially-dominated places where young people go to enjoy life (in chapter 5, I have mentioned bars and nightclubs in the case of Yaoundé), section 5.2. compares of mobile phone practices as beeping and relates it to sexuality, and section 5.3. compares how mobile phone call boxes are related to sexuality. The comparisons in sections 5.1., 5.2. and 5.3. are based upon data collected through participant observation. Next, I present a cross-cultural comparisons of the risk behaviors among young people in Yaoundé and Ghent in the following categorizations: section 5.4. compares the rates of risk behaviors such as alcohol drinking and smoking soft drugs and the role mobile phones play in facilitating the clustering of such behaviors, section 5.5. compares if both communities acknowledge whether a gift for sex practice is OK, section 5.6. compares whether in the two contexts students have or have had an additional sexual partner next to their present intimate partner, and finally section 5.7. presents a comparison of the communication about condoms in both cultural contexts. The comparisons presented in sections 5.4., 5.5., 5.6. and 5.7. are based upon quantitative data, gathered by means of questionnaires. More specifically, for section 5.4., I made use of the research questions YCS10 and YCS11, for section 5.5., it was research question MPANS4, section 5.6. is based upon research question FM7, and finally for section 5.7., I used the data gathered through research question YCS5. All research questions are included in the Annex part of this

dissertation, Annex 2 for the questions asked in Ghent, Annex 3 for the questions asked in Yaoundé.

## 6.1. Comparison of mobile phone usage at socially-dominated places where young people enjoy their lives

In the table below, I present the socially-dominated places of university students in both Yaoundé and Ghent, sites to relax, mingle and enjoy life.

City	Yaoundé	Ghent
<b>Bars</b>	Green Valley Bar	Overpoort Bowl Bar/café
<b>Nightclubs</b>	Katios , Djeuga	Decadence
<b>Restaurants</b>	Grassland Resto, Bonas, Obili	

**Table 13: Places where young people enjoy (socialize) in Yaoundé & Gent**

### 6.1.1. Mobile phone usage and sexual risk behaviors in bars compared (Green Valley Bar and Overpoort Bowl Bar/café)

The first difference between students' habits in relation to sexuality, is the process of dating through mobile phones. In Yaoundé, dating, which is also known as having a *rendez-vous*, involves an appointment with either a would-be sexual partner of the same age or with a would-be sexual partner who is older. The meeting of participants V1, V2, V3 and V4 at Green Valley Bar (see Chapter 5) is an illustration of a *rendez-vous* between younger and older sexual partners, as V3 and V4 (female students) were just 22 years old, and V1 and V2 (the males) were in their 40's. As V1 lives at Nkol'ndongo and V2 lives at Biyem-Assi, the use of mobile phones facilitated their *rendez-vous* at the Green Valley Bar.

At the bar in Ghent, the Overpoort Bowl, and contrary to what we witnessed at the Green Valley Bar, everyone present appeared to be a student and they consequently all had more or less the same age. I coded the participants at this site OB (meaning Overpoort Bowl), followed a number and an indication of their gender, m (male) or f (female). Some were sitting in groups around tables while drinking, while others were bowling. The first participants I encountered were OB1(f) and OB2(f), two female students, and I asked if they possessed a mobile phone, which they obviously did. Then I went on, since I did not see older people, to ask if age mattered during their dating and hang-out practices. They mentioned that they prefer to date and hang out with friends and classmates of the same age. As I was so

interested to hear their opinions concerning sexual relations with older people, especially sugar daddies, I asked if they could imagine fixing a date with such people. They mentioned that they could create social ties and hang out with older people, but preferably not with those who try to have sex with them. I also asked two male students OB3(m) and OB4(m) if they had mobile phones and it was obvious that they did too. Then, in the same way that I had asked the two girls, I questioned these two boys on their dating preferences in relation to age. They replied that they have the habit of socializing with friends of the same age and that if they date a girl, it is usually a class or school mate. In another informal interview with a group of four students whom I coded OB5(f), OB6(f), OB7(m) and OB8(m), I asked their opinions towards mobile phone networking with sex-seeking individuals, that is people whom they consider as strangers. The two girls mentioned that they currently had a boyfriend (*vriend* or *schatje* in Dutch) and if another person would solicit for sexual relations with them, they would simply say “sorry, I have a boyfriend.” Then I asked them that what they would do if they did not have a boyfriend and a man they do not know asks their phone number. They said their answer would be “sorry, but you don't know me.” According to these answers, soliciting one's mobile phone when you know little about each other appears to be weird and embarrassing in Ghent. Yet, the embarrassment is major if the solicitor turns out to be a much elder person would want to arrange a date or even to have sexual intercourse with them.

#### **6.1.2. Mobile phone usage and sexual risk behaviors in nightclubs compared (Katie's and Djeuga versus Decadence)**

My comparative data of nightclubs focus on the use of two SIM cards to manage two or more sexual relationships. In the case of Yaoundé, young people who use two mobile phones are mostly those who have a regular sexual partner but wish to engage in an additional (non-intimate) sexual relationship while dancing in a nightclub. In the same way, married people handle the two mobile phone-strategy to manage several sexual relations at the time too, that is one with their wife/husband and another with their non-intimate sexual partner(s), which are often university students. When they are at the nightclub, these individuals involved in an extra-marital relation do not use the same phone that they use to contact the home front. Similarly, Yaoundé's youngsters too use one phone to maintain their steady relationships and another to engage in non-steady sexual relationships, often with a *mboma*. Contrary to these findings, and although every youngster in Ghent seems to possess a mobile phone, having two is a rarity really. At the nightclub Decadence in Ghent, I tried to observe

anyone carrying two mobile phones, but I did not succeed in doing so. I did however decide to ask informal questions about the infidel use of two mobile phones anyhow, and involved six participants, coded DE1(m), DE2(m), DE3(m), DE4(f), DE5(f) and DE6(f). They unanimously claimed they never ever practiced this strategy.

## **6.2. Comparison of mobile phone usage of beeping related to sexuality**

In section 4.3. of Chapter 5, I have explained in detail what beeping means, both in youth culture in Yaoundé and in Cameroonian mainstream culture. I remind the reader that beeping is done either to just say hallo, or to urge the one who is beeped to call the beeper back. In this section, I compare how beeping is practiced and experienced in relation to sexuality both in Ghent and in Yaoundé.

Firstly, although beeping is fully incorporated into the daily discourse of youth culture in Yaoundé, this is not the case in Ghent. In this Belgian town, beeping is yet to become the widespread practice it is in Yaoundé, although it does appear at small scale. Secondly, people in Ghent interpret a beep very differently from those in Yaoundé, as ethnographic data gathered at the Overpoort Bowl Bar show. OB5(f) stated she felt that to beep someone or to be beeped by someone is weird, because it has no message. Another female, OBV6(f), said that in her opinion, if someone beeps another person, then the intention of the beeper is just to disturb this person. The male informants had different opinions as both OB7(m) and OB8(m) stated that if their girlfriends would beep them, they would try to understand why. The girlfriend might for instance be in need of security but running out of airtime credit to be able to tell so through the phone. OB8(m) went on to say that in this case, she might just beep because she fears that if she calls and the call gets the answering machine going, she will not be able to attempt another call because her airtime credit ran out. The two male students mentioned that even though beeping might be important in times of security, it is not a widespread practice because many consider it as a form of inconveniencing the other. In Yaoundé, people beep because they want the other to call them back. In particular, people beep their sexual partners who are trying to have (or are having) sexual relations with them. The beeps are therefore considered by those who receive them as *requests* to call the beeper back and to do so immediately. As seen, people in Yaoundé also beep by means of greeting, and it is never to disturb another person, as it may be the case in Ghent. For example, Yaoundé's youngsters beep their parents, aunts and uncles just to inform them that they are doing fine. A girl may beep her boyfriend very early in the morning, say at about 5am, just to inform him that she slept well and to tell "I thought about you at night."

### **6.3. Comparison of mobile phone usage in relation to mobile phone call boxes and sexuality**

As I mentioned in section 4.4. of Chapter 5, call boxes are new sources of livelihood as they comprise part of the business opportunities to earn some income in Yaoundé. At the same time, young people benefit too, as call box owners offer several opportunities. For example, most young people acquaint themselves with one particular call box owner in the neighborhood, so that when they have no money to make a call (for instance, to a *mboma*), they can negotiate with the owner to settle the bill later. In the end, it is the sexual partner (*mboma*) whom they have been calling through this call box, who pays the debt when he comes to visit his/her young sexual partner. Sometimes two sexual partners, especially a *mboma* and a student, will agree that in the case the student's phone is ruined, the student will use the phone number of the call box owner known to the *mboma*. Such agreements are usually settled long before the phone breaks, thus, the essence of making this pre-arrangement is to make sure that communication between them can be continued when the student's phone is (temporally) out of order. The *mboma* stores the call box number into his phone in advance, as the second number of his sexual partner (the student).

In Ghent, the call box boom as lived in Yaoundé, is non-existent. The students of Ghent University rely solely on the airtime credit on their phones if they want to make a call. When out of airtime credit, the alternative is to borrow a friend's phone to send a text message or to make a brief call to incite the callee to call back. However, since the last decades, many telephone shops have popped up and they are now a familiar sight in Belgium's urban landscape. A telephone shop is often run by immigrants, and provides not only telephone service at very low cost, but also access to internet and a limited range of groceries, mostly alcohol and cigarettes. Airtime credit is for sale too, but I did not hear of agreements similar to those between the Yaoundé youths and their call box owners.

### **6.4. Comparing the rates of risk behaviors (alcohol drinking and smoking among peers) and mobile phones facilitation of clustering such behaviors**

Table 14 presents an overview of the data which I will outline in detail in the following sections. It concerns data on the following issues: drinking and smoking during socializations (section 5.4.), acknowledging if a gift for sex practice is OK (section 5.5.), having or have had another sexual in addition the present intimate partner (section 5.6.), and communication about condoms (section 5.7.). These sections correspond to five risk behavior

domains, and the data are collected through 70 questionnaires in Ghent and another 70 randomly selected from the Yaoundé questionnaires, thus making the population or sample size ( $n = 140$ ).

Questions	Answers	Ghent	Yaoundé
Drink alcohol during socialization (YCS10)	Yes	<b>61(87.14%)</b>	<b>65(92.85%)</b>
Smoke during socialization (YCS11)	Yes	<b>30(42.85%)</b>	<b>9(12.85%)</b>
Gift for sex approval (MPASNS4)	Yes	<b>40(57.14%)</b>	<b>62(88.77%)</b>
Had other relations before this?(FM7)	Yes	<b>52(74.28%)</b>	<b>61(87.14%)</b>
Discuss about condoms during socializations (YCS5)	Yes	<b>30(42.85%)</b>	<b>20(28.57%)</b>
<b>Total</b>			

**Table 14:Percentage comparison of RSB in Ghent & Yaoundé**

Before going into the data analysis of drinking during socialization, I wish to emphasize that I aim to find out how mobile phone usage relates to the consummation of alcohol and the smoking of soft drugs, and how this in turn contributes to patterns of sexual risk behavior. Firstly, I argue that within youth cultures both in Ghent and in Yaoundé, mobile phone usage plays an important role in the virtual space of peer connectivity. Moreover, shared behaviors as alcohol drinking or smoking may depend upon the amount of intimate contacts filed on youngsters' mobile phones. Arguably, mobile phone devices can be used to map clusters of persons who share such behaviors. As such, mobile phones are clustering devices that facilitate habits such as partying combined with a heavy consummation of alcohol and smoking that does not involve regular cigarettes, but marijuana or weed<sup>50</sup>. For example, a simple text message from one person notifying others to meet and party at the nightclubs Katios (in Yaoundé) or Decadence (in Ghent), can be indexed into a group message and sent to multiple contacts. This type of text messaging indicates how the social profile of a mobile phone is relevant to social, yet risky attitudes that may lead to unsafe sex during or after partying.

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<sup>50</sup> In the same way, the internet allows to electronically coordinate group activities by sending one e-mail to several e-mail addresses at the time.

As Table 14 shows, the rates for alcohol drinking are high in both sites, but slightly more university students of Yaoundé (92.85 %) drink alcohol compared to those of Ghent (87.14 %). As for smoking, there is a wider gap, the rate of participants who smoke in Yaoundé (12.85%) being considerably lower than the rate of those in Ghent (42.85%).

The rate of smoking soft drugs however does not come close to the drinking rate. This in part is due to the fact that alcohol drinking is a social activity that defines membership and helps to maintain one's identity, both in Yaoundé and in Ghent youth culture. Since the use of mobile phones has widened the range of human connectedness, it also facilitated the participation in group activities such as drinking and smoking. Mobile phones not only expanded the ways to make contact with others, they also transformed dating practices which are associated with drinking and smoking. The above findings explain the widespread adoption of these devices. Life-worlds, such as the one of a group of young people who are partying, can be opened up by a mobile phone network which informs us about the kind of activities (such as drinking and smoking) that are going on. Those who say yes to smoking and alcohol drinking are most likely to receive a text message by a group member (a node in the network phenomenon) who indexed it as a group message to facilitate the clustering of partying activities. On the contrary, the probability that those who did not indicate that they drink alcohol and smoke soft drugs will respond to this type of social clustering through text messaging, is low.

The respondents who indicated that they smoke are more likely the ones that also drink alcohol. Importantly, among the 92.85% (alcohol) and 12.85% (smoking) in Yaoundé and the 87.14% (alcohol) and 42.85% (smoking) in Ghent, there is a likelihood of having unprotected sex after the drinking and smoking. Those who drink alcohol or take drugs in order to get intoxicated, are more exposed to HIV high risk behaviors as intoxication has been identified as a form of drug abuse that impacts such behavior. The scholars Konyuy and Wisonge (2007) stated that alcohol drinking influences both multiple-sexual relations and unsafe sex in Cameroon. My cross-cultural analyses shows that the difference between sexual risks behavior in Ghent and Yaoundé relies on two categories of clustering. In Ghent, it relies on alcohol-related and casual sex with peers, whereas in Yaoundé, it relies on alcohol-related and casual sex with peers, but also with individuals who are having extra-marital affairs, such as *mbomas*.

The smoking of drugs like marijuana compared to alcohol drinking alcohol is less socially-approved, especially by the elderly. The latter even consider the smoking of such drugs as a non-Christian practice and an unhealthy habit, and consequently associate it to high-risk behavior. Accordingly, if the smoking of drugs is disapproved by elders in Cameroon, then smokers may find text messaging very convenient to avoid the monitoring by elders in the clustering of smoking activities. This confirms previous finding by researchers about the use of text messages to veil activities that are socially-disapproved and likely to attract intrusion. For instance, Ito (2005:133) mentions that texting is “less intrusive, less subject to peripheral monitoring and allowing easy contact with spatially distributed peers.” Theoretically, tobacco and other drugs are incorporated into substance abuse and sexual risk behaviors for HIV infection by researchers on Africa (e.g. King 2004, Seme et al. 2005). The difference in smoking patterns between Ghent and Yaoundé is explained by the different influences both of the socio-cultural realm (social control by parents or family) and the personal realm (peer pressure) that exist between the two cultural backgrounds. In Ghent, as in many other European cities, smoking is still subject to personal decisions to the extent that even secondary school students may decide to smoke. On the contrary, in Yaoundé, the economic cost of smoking (that is the income burden) adds to its disapproval by the elder generation.

## **6.5. Acknowledging if the gift for sex practice is OK**

In Yaoundé, 88.57% of the respondents approve of the gift and sex linkage. On the one hand, the Cameroonian percentage is high because these participants certainly grew up in an environment where these practices are common and quite widely acknowledged. On the other, the high percentage indicates that receiving a gift in exchange for sex has a direct association with one of the social goals, more particularly to gain material support. I will elaborate further on these two points.

I begin with arguing that for young people in Yaoundé, their perception of sexual life depends on the environment they grew up in, that is their home, school and communities, spaces where their social lives develop. These social spaces shape their early sexual experiences and what they feel is appropriate or inappropriate. Consequently, the high percentage (88.57%) is an indication that these students grew up in the environments where receiving a gift in exchange for sexual involvement does not produce any form of *guilt*. Secondly, the high percentage means that young people are constantly in search of social goals, one of which is precisely to gain material support. By exchanging sex for the gifts they



receive, they succeed to fulfill this particular goal. Gifts, according to Hunter (2002), play a vital role in fuelling everyday sex between men and women in sub-Saharan Africa.

Compared to Yaoundé, where 88.77% of the respondents approved that a gift can influence one to have sex with the gift giver, in Ghent 57.14 % does. Note that in the latter case, the proposition in the questionnaire was phrased “A gift can influence sex?” and answering options were TRUE or FALSE, whereas in Yaoundé the proposition was slightly different: “Do you think a gift can influence sex?” with options YES or NO (question MPASNS4). Apparently, many Ghent respondents figured the proposition was to be applied to gifts exchanged within a steady relationship exclusively, as they grew up in an environment and culture where gift for sex practices are not common and even socially disapproved of. Filling in their questionnaires, they did not even consider this option.

There are additional and important explanations for the gap between the two cultural contexts. First and foremost, most Belgian parents can afford to pay for the education of their children and provide basic non-academic needs. Secondly, even if the parents do not have a decent income, Belgium is a welfare economy, and students without financial support from parents still benefit from resources that enable them to pay the rent, school fees and other living expenses. Thirdly, notwithstanding the support from parents and benefits from the welfare economy, students in Ghent have opportunities to work during holidays (Christmas break, spring break and summer holiday). This money earned allows them to meet the other needs, such as expensive mobile phones, iPads amongst others, which their parents may not provide them. That Ghent’s university students have these job opportunities, might explain why they do not feel the need to create social ties with sugar daddies or mummies. Previous scholarly literature, for example by Kuate-Defo (2004), showed how young people in Cameroon create ties with sugar daddies and sugar mummies precisely in order to gain material support through forms of gift. A similar illustration comes from Hunter (2002) and deals with the sugar daddies of South Africa. Hunter describes the creation of ties between young people and sugar daddies in South Africa as *qomaing* (choosing a lover), and if young people do not *qoma*, they will not get the financial support or the commodities they crave for. In the Nigerian context, Smith (2007) mentions that due to the financial inequalities, the widespread aspirations for a “modern” life and the gender disparities, Ibo men upscale their status by boasting about the several sexual partners whom they sponsor.

## **6.6. Previous sexual relation**

As Table 15 shows, 74.28% of the respondents in Ghent as compared to 87.14% in Yaoundé indicated that they have had another sexual relations before the current one. The percentages are equally high in both cultural backgrounds, but in Yaoundé, slightly more respondents had (a) previous sexual relation(s). This might be an indication of certain distinct sexual habits in sexual in Ghent and in Yaoundé. In the latter city for instance, respondents might more often have had previous sexual partners because of the following distinct sexual habits: (a) partner concurrency, and (b) intergenerational sexual relationship.

### **6.6.1. Partner concurrency**

Concurrent sexual relations, also known as overlapping sexual relations, account for the transmission of STDs including the HIV infection in sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly in Cameroon. Since mobile phones are devices that have increased our connectedness, they also account for an increase in the number of sexual partners who want to manage different sexual relations at the same time. The use of two mobile phones is a technique that simplifies this handling of overlapping relations, as outlined in previous parts of this study. In the realm of networks – and in our case more specifically a mobile phone social network profile – the person who keeps several sexual partners at the same time, is considered as a node with whom several other sexual partners are connected to. This node has the burden of maintaining the loci of communicating effective between the different sexual partners through phone calls and text messages. Since concurrency implies different partner types (intimate, sugar daddies or mummies, and other casual sexual partners), the person (the node) will not only face the challenge of using mobile phone to communicate effectively, but also the barriers to negotiate condom use.

While the respondents of Yaoundé reported having had previous sexual relations due to the concurrent affairs they have/had, frequent break ups may also be at its origin. But more than in Yaoundé, Ghent's students change partners rather frequently. In other words, the university students of Ghent may not necessarily hold sexual partners simultaneously, yet they may have experienced a succession of breaks-ups, since my data show that part of their previous relationships lasted for only one month. Furthermore, I put stress on the role the mobile phones play in maintaining the current sexual relation. Specifically text messages play a vital role in sexual relationship attachments as they strengthen or weaken levels of ties

between two sexual partners. As such, a previous relationship may have been weakened following insatiable text messages that failed to prove the addressee that the sender is fully in love (too). Intimate relationships are, in most cases, fulfilled when the two partners are convinced that there are *strings attached* between them<sup>51</sup>. In the absence of such assurance, one of the sexual partners may feel more emotional attachment to a concurring lover and may chose for him/her in the end, terminating the unsatisfying affair.

### 6.6.2. Intergenerational sexual relationships

Similar to the gift for sex practices outlined section 6.5., intergenerational sexual relations are widely acknowledged and deeply rooted in daily discourse in Yaoundé, and most often they involve a young person and a *mboma*. As for Ghent, and due to the reasons explored above (Belgium being a welfare economy and most parents having sufficient resources to provide basic needs to their children), intergenerational sex occurs much less, and is phrased by some respondents as something they wish never to be involved in.

Both the issue of the elder gift-giving partner and the issue of sex in exchange for gift, are scrutinized in current linguistic research on slang and colloquialism in Cameroon. Epoge (2012:141) mentions that the “*mboma* (only sugar daddy in this case) is a very old boyfriend of a young girl who provides almost all her needs.” Additionally, Anchimbe (2012) incorporates the cheating strategies of *mbomas* and mentions they are called “*deuxième bureau*” (second office). According to Anchimbe, “a woman involved in an extra-marital relationship with a married man is referred to as *deuxième bureau*” (Anchimbe 2012:43). The idea of office, the author states, refers to errant husbands telling their wives they were in the office, when explaining their delays in arriving home. Arguably, during these explanations, mobile phones come in handy as they allow to talk from a distance, and even in presence of the other sexual partner who is the real reason for the overdue homecoming. Moreover, the infidel men can apply two mobile phones to simultaneously manage the situation at home and the one of the girl in whose presence he is at that time. The two phone strategy explains, in part, why a high number of respondents in Yaoundé reported having concurrent sexual partners. However, when these additional sexual affairs involve inequalities, as already

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<sup>51</sup> Routine text messaging between two intimate partners who are temporarily separated by distance enhances amorous feelings whereas a failure to regularly send messages might lead to a breakup.

elaborated in other parts of this study, they might bring along hindrances to communicate about the use of condoms. This brings us to the issue analyzed in the next section.

## **6.7. The discussion about condoms with sexual partners**

In this section, the comparison will focus on (in)consistency in the use of condoms, inspired by the assumption that those who communicate about condoms are more likely to use them and as such to practice safe sex. Indeed, research about safe sex practices has largely adopted inquiries on the communication about the use of condoms with sexual partners into their studies. As for our research sites, 42.85% of the respondents in Ghent confirmed they did touch upon the topic with their sexual partners, whereas in Yaoundé only 28.57% did. Following the network theories, the communication about the use of condoms with the people one had created sexual ties with through a mobile phone, is a crucial issue for research dealing with sexually transmitted diseases. And since young people in Yaoundé use mobile phones to create social ties meant to gain material support, it is also crucial to consider the use of these devices in youth culture research. Determinants of condom use among young people may also depend on their levels of social connectivity, especially as mobile phones might increase the number of sexual partners. Consequently, the larger the amount of sexual partners, the bigger the challenges one faces in order to ensure protected sex. The figures show that participants in Ghent display a more perceived ability to practice safe sex as compared to those in Yaoundé. In Yaoundé, only 28.57% of the participants manifest what Meekers and Klein (2002) describe as condom use self-efficacy which they observed among young people in urban Cameroon. As for the participants that stated they did discuss the use of condoms, I suggest some possible reasons why they did so. The first cause is their perceived risk of pregnancy. Most young people who communicate about the use of condom with sexual partners do so primarily to avoid pregnancies rather than STDs, including HIV. Thus, their yes to the question whether they discuss condom matters, may merely display their contraceptive behavior for pregnancy prevention. Others may be motivated by their assessment of risk of contracting HIV should they not use a condom. Among those who mentioned not discussing the topic of condom use, some may feel that condoms reduce pleasure during sexual intercourse. Also, some may be motivated by the fact that they have either known someone who died from AIDS or someone who lived with HIV/AIDS. These types of risk perception increase young people's self-efficacy to communication with their sexual partners and to the use condoms.

## **Remarks**

With the above comparative data, I tried to provide new paths for further social science investigations towards the social causes of diseases, exploring how the use of mobile phones facilitates group activities such as partying immersed by alcohol, soft drugs and casual sex. Text messaging and phone calling, among young people in Ghent as much as in Yaoundé, have profoundly altered youth culture and may be partly allocated blame for causing HIV transmission, or at least for simplifying the transmission of HIV. Nonetheless, HIV prevention could be intensely improved if we consider and compare the distinct sexual risk behaviors that anticipate HIV transmission. For example, social science researchers should focus on the three social goals as one of the motivations of Yaoundé's youth to engage in multi-sexual relations. It is also insightful to consider that university students in Ghent mention that the gift for sex practice produces a sense of guilt, whereas to those of Yaoundé, it is a perfectly normal practice.

## **6.8. Other socio-cultural differences on sexuality among young people in Ghent and Yaoundé**

Through the anthropological perspective, and besides the use of phones to facilitate sexual encounters, I compare additional socio-cultural processes. This supplementary focus is on the interpretations of death, as these too may create barriers and prejudice safe sex, and consequently lead to risk behaviors and the ensuing disease spread. First, I argue that potential barriers in Yaoundé are the witchcraft accusations, a belief which prevents to understand that unsafe sex practices are the main cause of AIDS mortality among young people. Secondly, I argue that beliefs in witchcraft may trigger difficulties for health workers to carry out proper inquiry on HIV transmission within local populations in Yaoundé in ways that they might not in Ghent. We live in the era when new communication technologies are not only impacting our daily businesses, safety and the fostering of social support, but also facilitating the pace at which young people engage in sexual risk behaviors. Thus, I also argue that phone calls and text messages now replace age-old mechanisms through which certain individual acts could fuel suspicion for cheating in sexual relationships. Witchcraft beliefs even have legal backing, as section 251 of the 1967 Cameroonian penal code shows. In this code, the government stipulates the following punishment:

*"Whoever commits any act of witchcraft, magic or divination liable to disturb public order or tranquility, or to harm another person, property or substance, whether by taking a reward or otherwise, shall be punished with imprisonment from two to ten years, and with a fine of five thousand to one hundred thousand francs (Fisiy, 1998).*

Backed by this penal code, judges in courts, particularly in the South province of Cameroon, accept the testimony of a *nganga* or a traditional healer during a lawsuit (Geschiere 2008). Geschiere and Fisiy (1994) provide facts in support of this penal code by mentioning that since the occult forces were thought to be on the increase, the Cameroonian government could no longer remain indifferent to sorcery or witchcraft. These types of belief have been, and are still, some of the cultural barriers in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Cameroon. Championed by the works of Evans-Pritchard, anthropologists as Ember and Ember (2004), who have been studying witchcraft in Africa, define it as: "the practice of attempting to harm people by supernatural means, but through emotions and thought alone, not through the use of tangible objects" (Ember and Ember 2004). Evans-Pritchard mentions the following about witchcraft among the Azande ethnic group:

*"Azande believe that witchcraft is a substance in the bodies of witches, a belief which is found among many peoples in Central and West Africa (Evans-Pritchard, 1939: 1) .....Death is due to witchcraft and must be avenged. All other practices connected to witchcraft are epitomized in the action of vengeance" (Evans-Pritchard, 1930:5).*

Evans-Pritchard's definition shows (in the example of Azande) how the allocation of the cause of illness/death, for example HIV/AIDS in Cameroon, can point to witchcraft instead of to sexual risk behavior. In other words, Evans-Pritchard's definition of witchcraft is insightful to capture what health workers have, in part, been facing in the fight against AIDS. The challenge for health workers even increases in those cases where the scientific and clinical proofs of the causes of the illness or death are sound.

#### **6.8.1. Explaining mobile phone sexual risk behaviors following Evans-Pritchard's inquiry on witchcraft**

Mobile phones and their use, as I have argued in the previous chapters, facilitate, maintain and even create risk among connected persons, for instance, those who are connected through the exchange of gift for sex. This form of social connectivity is new, and it expands as more people adopt mobile phone usage in their matters of sexuality and materiality. Thus, this form of social connectivity may contribute to the creation of new social loci of probing disease

spread, instead of witchcraft that relies on testimonies of *nganga* to provide facts about disease and death. Also, mobile phone use has modified culture and impacts our sexual lives both in positive and negative ways. Evans-Pritchard has shown in his work that witchcraft leans on the psychological persuasion that one person harms or try to harm another, and this can be applied to our research context as well. The person who wants to do harm, in our case, is the sex-seeking *mboma*, and this conviction should be considered as one of the social causes of disease spread, since sexual intercourse with *mbomas* is often unprotected. In the introduction I mentioned a practical testimony of the death of a young man in Buea (from my ethnic group Bakossi), a conversation between a woman and a friend of mine, that ran as follows: Question: *what killed that young man?* Answer: *we do no longer ask people what caused the death of a young person*. This answer expresses two ideas (a) that previously, people did not know what was killing young people, and (b) that AIDS is now acknowledged to be the disease that kills young people so we do not need to search for other causes. A third idea may be the acceptance of the social situation, where rich old men have the means to impact on the young. According to a report of the International AIDS Society (2014), AIDS is a social disease and because of this, social science researchers like anthropologists address the socio-cultural drivers of HIV transmission. For example, cultural norms and beliefs such as the belief on sorcery as barriers to achieve appropriate data on the spread of HIV in some local populations. The analyses above are not only limited to HIV/AIDS as epilepsy, according to Njamshi (2008), is interpreted by local knowledge, attitudes and practices in Nso (Cameroon) linked to witchcraft too. These beliefs increase our understanding of how diseases are interpreted beyond medical explanations of how sickness defeats the body (Hengehold 2009).

### **6.8.2. Does the government need to re-evaluate the law on witchcraft in relation to AIDS related death?**

The explanation of diseases' causes by witchcraft, could be applied in the future re-evaluation, by policy makers, of Cameroon's penal code (section 251) mentioned above. The re-evaluation implies that the government is considering how young people may be tempted to engage in risk behaviors because they want to acquire the latest style of clothing or the newest devices of communication technology. A good number of researchers who analyze the impact of new communication technologies in Cameroon, state that young people are steadily at the frontiers of mobility and therefore, the scholars add, they would do everything – including offering their bodies – in order to collect the necessary money to go to Europe in

a quest for greener pastures. Frei (2011) as well as Nyamjoh, Brinkman and DeBruijn (2009) are particularly interested in these types of mobility-related motivations and they try to find out how young people use mobile phones and the internet to settle marriages, education or jobs which will enable them to “fall bush.”<sup>52</sup> Emigration to a Western country is a good example of one of the three social goals I mentioned severally in the earlier chapters, namely increasing longer-term life chances. As far as sexuality is concerned, new communication technologies also provide various forms of social behaviors which might put our lives in danger. For example, text messages are now used for cheating between intimate sexual partners and consequently raise the modes of HIV transmission. Ironically, when cheating partners become infected with HIV and even die because of AIDS, family members will usually visit a traditional healer to find out the cause of death. Due to section 251 of the penal code, if the traditional healer's oracular injunctions point as cause of death to witchcraft, the accused (the person who is said to have caused the disease) will be brought to court and may be sentenced to prison and also pay a substantial amount of money (fine). We live in the era of HIV which for the past two decades has been one of the major causes of death among the sexually-active population. Epidemiologists who focus on the spread of HIV in sub-Saharan Africa have been considering cultural barriers, especially the beliefs such as witchcraft, among the barriers to HIV prevention in this region, next to barriers as unsafe sex practices. Most of the latter sexual risk behaviors are those found among “youth who engage in age-old behaviors such as chatting, flirting, and dating in novel ways” (CDC report on Technology and Adolescent HIV risk, page 7, 2014)<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> Also see Alpes, Jill Maybritt (2012) in *Bushfalling at all cost: The economy of migratory knowledge in Anglophone Cameroon*.

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.cdc.gov/std/life-stages-populations/Adolescents-white-paper.pdf>



## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The current HIV research by Sanou and co-workers (2013) and by UNAIDS (2012) include some statistics on the deadly pandemic which show that HIV prevalence in Cameroon has decreased from 5.5% in 2004 to 4.3% in 2011. Furthermore, a more recent UNAIDS report (UNAIDS, 2013) states that sexual transmission of HIV will reduce by 50% in 2015.

Notwithstanding these promises, huge threats of further transmission still exist because little attention is paid to the new modes of transmission that have stepped into the limelight.

Indeed, social science researchers as well as governmental health experts have been prioritizing a change of sexual behavior as preventive measure to stop the further spread of HIV contamination, attributing the spread solely to unsafe sex practices. However, they have so far neglected the social causes that lead to these unsafe practices in the first place. I argue that the use of mobile phones in the process of sexual courting and flirting, facilitates permissive sexual activities at a frequency unnoticed before. On top of that, the acquisition of a phone in itself has today become a plausible ground for venturing on transactional sex. As such, mobile phones are devices that every person concerned with public health should seriously take into consideration.

The qualitative data gathered among youths in Yaoundé show that three baseline social goals determine how they use their mobile phones to arrange their sexual lives. In their eyes, a mobile phone is a device that helps to gain material support, to increase their status in the eyes of peers and to augment longer-term life chances. By means of illustration, status could be enhanced by the possession of a sophisticated phone or laptop. A longer-term life chance could consist of a steady job in Cameroon, or of migration to Europe where life is supposed to be better. Yet, due to the country's precarious economic situation, most of Yaoundé's youths cannot afford to achieve these goals by their own means. Thus, an alternative way is to use the opportunity a mobile phone offers, that is it allows to set up a network of people – especially *mbomas* – who make the goals accessible in exchange for sexual intercourse. Not surprisingly, significantly more students with a poorer background (those whose parents are farmers) stated that being offered a gift influences them to give in to sexual advances. Also, the social connectivity (the sexual partners and solicitors filed in their

phones) of high school students was much higher than that of university students, because the younger ones are more pliant and consequently susceptible to sexual advances, especially when these involve the promise of a gift.

Yaoundé's young people acknowledge the gift for sex practice as part of a normal way of life because they grew up in an environment where it is common to relate material goods to sexual activities. In Ghent however, accepting a gift in exchange for sex produces a sense of guilt, and few respondents approve of it. Because it is the socio-economic context that pushes Yaoundé's youth to get involved in this type of sexual practices, I simply define them as survival sex, and my data show that survival sex is fully integrated into Yaoundé's youth culture. In a welfare state as Belgium, youths are less likely to get involved in transactional sex, simply because most of their needs are within reach.

Mediated-communication through mobile phones allows a young Cameroonian to be linked to such "useful" individuals. Eventually, the students engage in sexual relations with their gift giver. The risk of HIV transmission this sexual relation brings along, inherently depends upon the partners' decision to commit themselves to safe sex. However, the gift givers holds a dominant position, being the one who can make the achievement of the goals come true, and the one who receives may lack the agency to impose the use of condoms. Furthermore, *mbomas* generally believe that sex with younger partners invigorates their blood, that "young girls are less likely to be infected with HIV" (Luke 2005:6) and that a condom is a hindrance, similar to "eating candies in plastics," as phrased in popular discourse, beliefs that lead to unsafe practices. In addition, as my data on high school and university students of Yaoundé show, only very few youths like to communicate about condoms with their sexual partners, be it with *mbomas* or with their (non)steady partners. As a result, their use of condoms is very inconsistent both in their true romances and in their affairs imbued with transactional sex.

In brief, two phenomena intersect in the Yaoundé context; firstly youths have three social goals in mind which they crave to achieve, and sexual relations with wealthy people can help to reach these goals, and secondly, mobile phones increase their social connectivity, that is the number of (former, present and future) sexual partners, including those who help to reach their social goals.

My arguments throughout this study and the above intersection demonstrate how mobile phones have become a factor in the risk behaviors leading to the spread of STDs which should not be underestimated. Indeed, I illustrated the role mobile phones play in the spread of STDs, merely by facilitating gift for sex agreements, and the ensuing unsafe sexual activities. Therefore, I recommend future health research to pay special attention to mobile phone usage as an emergent factor for disease spread. In harmony with epidemiological research, anthropological inquiry deepens the insights on risky courtship ways through mediated communication. Such interdisciplinary research takes into account the emerging modes of disease spread which social science only slowly responded to so far. Sanou et al. (2013) put forward that the threat of further HIV transmission lies in the low use of condoms among young people. As for myself, I argue that the threat is further aggravated because mobile phone usage is too often neglected in current research, whereas it is this usage that enables to create contacts that lead to unsafe sexual intercourse in the very first place. The transactional part implies that the girl should be willing to sacrifice her health.

I also recommend that prevention programs, to reach youths', make use of the communication means that they prefer, which are notably mobile phones, as this study has broadly outlined. Text messages could be sent to inform young people about campaigns that are organized or about conferences on HIV spread that take place, but also to spread small talk and all kinds of petty facts related to the issue, by means of sensitization and raising awareness.

This dissertation carves mobile phones' impact on sexuality and consequently on the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection. It opens a promising avenue for further interdisciplinary research. Finally, it challenges health intervention programs to fully integrate the use of mobile phones into their prevention schemes, both as cause for disease spread and as solution to halt the spread.



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## ANNEXE 1

### LOWER SIXTH LYCEE DE MENDONG

Question 1 (following a series of the nine main questions that we asked in each of the high school) had the following responses: "I definitely have a mobile phone" (MLA(f)), "I don't feel comfortable when I don't have my mobile phone with me" (MLE (f)), "I have a mobile phone and have had many" (MLI(f)), "I have one right now and as new brands are advertised in the market I try to get the latest" (MLO(f)), "I definitely have one"(MLU(f)), "I can stay without a phone so I have one"(MLY(f)), "of course, I have a mobile phone, I can stay sometimes without one but that is when the one I have is broken or missing and after sometimes I try to get another one" (MLA(m)), "Yes I do have one"(MLE(m))", "Yes I have a mobile phone"(MLI(m)), "It is like a watch that I wear on my wrist every time so I definitely have one"(MLO(m)), "Of course I do have because if I don't I loss connection with my friends"(MLU(m)), "I have not just one because I need two or three for different purposes"(MLY(m)).

To the second question, responses were as follows: "I have so many contacts, I don't know the exact number but I am sure there are more than 30"(MLA(f)), "I have more than 30 contacts surely" (MLE (f)), "I have so many but don't know the exact number" (MLI(f)), "I have so many contacts on my phone, surely more than 30" (MLO(f)), "I definitely have more than 30"(MLU(f)), "I have realized that most people who know little or nothing about me and yet go about asking my phone number just want to have sex, thus, I avoid giving out my number to, and keeping phone numbers of, strangers"(MLY(f)), "I have about 20 contacts"(MLA(m)), "I don't have many contacts on my phone, I am sure just between 5 to 10"(MLE(m)), "there are about 5 to 10 contacts" (MLI(m)), "I have many"(MUO(m)), "Many"(MLU(m)), "I have about 20"(MLY(m)).

To the third questions, answers were as follows: "yes, its possible"(MLA(f)), "yes" (MLE (f)), "Yes" (MLI(f)), "yes" (MLO(f)), "yes"(MLU(f)), "yes"(MLY(f)), "yes it's possible" (MLA(m)), "it depends"(MLE(m))", "yes it's possible"(MLI(m)), "yes it is possible because it's a gift and phones are expensive yet people need them so badly that

offering one can influence a sexual relation”(MLO(m)), “Of course, yes”(MLU(m)), “yes indeed”(MLY(m)).

To question 4, the answers were as follows: "the majority" (MLA(f)), “the majority ” (MLE (f)), “the majority” (MLI(f)), “the majority” (MLO(f)), “the majority”(MLU(f)), “the majority”(MLY(f)), “the minority” (MLA(m)), “the minority”(MLE(m))”, “the minority”(MLI(m)), “the minority”(MLO(m)), “Rarely if ever”(MLU(m)), “the minority”(MLY(m)).

To question 5, answers were as follows: "always" (MLA(f)), “often" (MLE (f)), “often” (MLI(f)), “sometimes” (MLO(f)), “always”(MLU(f)), “often”(MLY(f)), “sometimes” (MLA(m)), “sometimes”(MLE(m))”, “sometimes”(MLI(m)), “sometimes”(MLO(m)), “often”(MLU(m)), “sometimes”(MLY(m)).

To the sixth question, answers were: "yes I do" (MLA(f)), “yes" (MLE (f)), “yes” (MLI(f)), “yes” (MLO(f)), “yes”(MLU(f)), “yes”(MLY(f)), “yes” (MLA(m)), “yes”(MLE(m))”, “yes”(MLI(m)), “yes”(MLO(m)), “yes”(MLU(m)), “yes”(MLY(m)).

To the seventh question, responses were: "I had because he satisfied my needs" (MLA(f)), “yes" (MLE (f)), “yes” (MLI(f)), “yes” (MLO(f)), “yes”(MLU(f)), “yes”(MLY(f)), “yes” (MLA(m)), “yes”(MLE(m))”, “yes”(MLI(m)), “sometimes”(MLO(m)), “sometimes”(MLU(m)), “sometimes”(MLY(m)).

To the eighth question, answers were: "sometimes" (MLA(f)), “sometimes" (MLE (f)), “when it is necessary” (MLI(f)), “sometimes” (MLO(f)), “sometimes”(MLU(f)), “often”(MLY(f)), “sometimes” (MLA(m)), “sometimes”(MLE(m))”, “sometimes”(MLI(m)), “sometimes”(MLO(m)), “if need be”(MLU(m)), “sometimes”(MLY(m)).

To the ninth question, answers were as follows: "always" (MLA(f)), “always" (MLE (f)), “sometimes” (MLI(f)), “often” (MLO(f)), “always”(MLU(f)), “often”(MLY(f)), “sometimes” (MLA(m)), “sometimes”(MLE(m))”, “sometimes”(MLI(m)), “sometimes”(MLO(m)), “often”(MLU(m)), “sometimes”(MLY(m)). These were all answers

to the nine main questions that were asked to the lower sixth class of Lycée de Mendong. Below are their responses (of lower sixth class) to questions that were improvised. I will write down the improvised questions first and then the answers since these questions were not uniform like the nine questions. In other words, the improvised questions varied according the high school. I also want to mention here that for improved questions, not all the participants responded, thus, I will only present the answers of, and codes to indicate, participants who responded.



## UPPER SIXTH LYCEE DE MENDONG

In the next section, I present data collected from focus group discussions with the upper sixth class of Lycée de Mendong. I begin with answers from the nine main questions and later the improved questions that were asked. To the first question, we had the following responses: "It's difficult for me to stay without a phone" (MUA(f)), "I have a phone and I need it all the time" (MUE (f)), "the phone is a very important device for my daily life so I definitely have one" (MUI(f)), "I need it all the time so I have it all the time" (MUO(f)), "I definitely have one"(MLU(f)), "I have one"(MUY(f)), "I have one ofcourse" (MUA(m)), "I have two, one is for MTN sim card and one for Orange sim card"(MUE(m))", "I also have two phones"(MUI(m)), "I have one"(MUO(m)), "I have one"(MUU(m)), "I have two"(MUY(m)).

To the second question, responses were as follows: "I have less than 15"(MUA(f)), "I have more than 10" (MUE (f)), "I don't know the exact amount" (MUI(f)), "I about 10 or more" (MUO(f)), "Maybe 15 to 20"(MUU(f)), "“Perhaps more than 20”(MUY(f)), "Many"(MUA(m)), "About 5 to 10"(MUE(m)), "there are about 5 to 10 contacts" (MUI(m)), "I have many"(MUO(m)), "About 15 to 20"(MUU(m)), "More than 20"(MUY(m)).

To the third questions, answers were as follows: "it depends"(MUA(f)), "not always the case" (MLE (f)), "Yes" (MUI(f)), "it depends" (MUO(f)), "it depends what the receiver wants and what he/she prefers"(MLU(f)), "yes"(MUY(f)), "yes" (MUA(m)), "it depends"(MUE(m))", "possible"(MUI(m)), "yes"(MUO(m)), "yes"(MUU(m)), "yes indeed"(MUY(m)).

To question 4, the answers were as follows: "majority" (MUA(f)), "majority " (MUE (f)), "I think the majority" (MUI(f)), "majority" (MUO(f)), "majority"(MUU(f)), "the majority"(MUY(f)), "I can't really say" (MUA(m)), "the minority"(MUE(m))", "the minority"(MUI(m)), "the minority"(MUO(m)), "the monrity"(MUU(m)), "minority"(MUY(m)).

To question 5, answers were as follows: "sometimes" (MUA(f)), "often" (MUE (f)), "often" (MUI(f)), "often" (MUO(f)), "always"(MUU(f)), "often"(MUY(f)), "sometimes" (MUA(m)), "sometimes"(MUE(m))", "sometimes"(MUI(m)), "sometimes"(MUO(m)), "often"(MUU(m)), "rarely"(MUY(m)).

To the sixth question, answers were: "yes I do" (MUA(f)), "yes" (MUE (f)), "yes" (MUI(f)), "yes" (MUO(f)), "yes"(MUU(f)), "yes"(MUY(f)), "yes" (MUA(m)),

“yes”(MUE(m)), “yes”(MUI(m)), “yes”(MUO(m)), “yes”(MUU(m)),  
“sometimes”(MUY(m)).

To the seventh question, responses were: "yes" (MUA(f)), “I had a few months ago” (MUE(f)), “yes” (MUI(f)), “yes” (MUO(f)), “yes”(MUU(f)), “yes”(MUY(f)), “yes” (MUA(m)), “yes”(MUE(m)), “yes”(MUI(m)), “yes”(MUO(m)), “sometimes”(MUU(m)), “yes”(MUY(m)).

To the eighth question, answers were: "sometimes" (MUA(f)), “sometimes” (MUE(f)), “sometimes” (MUI(f)), “sometimes” (MUO(f)), “sometimes”(MUU(f)), “sometimes”(MUY(f)), “sometimes” (MUA(m)), “sometimes”(MUE(m)), “sometimes”(MUI(m)), “sometimes”(MUO(m)), “sometimes”(MUU(m)), “sometimes”(MUY(m)).

To the ninth question, answers were as follows: "often" (MUA(f)), “always” (MUE(f)), “sometimes” (MUI(f)), “often” (MUO(f)), “often”(MUU(f)), “often”(MUY(f)), “sometimes” (MUA(m)), “sometimes”(MUE(m)), “sometimes”(MUI(m)), “sometimes”(MUO(m)), “sometimes”(MUU(m)), “sometimes”(MUY(m)). The above are answers from participants in upper sixth class of Lycée de Mendong. In the next section, I will present their answers to improvised questions.

## **LOWER SIXTH LBA**

Question 1 (of the nine main questions) had the following responses: "I definitely have a mobile phone" (LLA(f)), "I have a phone and I take it along with me everywhere that I go" (MLE (f)), “It is a very important devices nowadays, thus I can't do without it” (LLI(f)), “I even had two phones but I gave one to my younger sister because as everyone needs a phone now, she automatically deserve one too” (LLO(f)), “I have one”(LLU(f)), “Yes I have a mobile phone”(LLY(f)), “it difficult to stay without a mobile phone, I always feel I am lost whenever I don't have one” (LLA(m)), “I do have one”(LLE(m)), “I have”(LLI(m)), “Indeed I have one”(LLO(m)), “I need it all the time so I have one”(LLU(m)), “I have one through which I even use internet”(LLY(m)).

To the second question, responses were as follows: "I don't know the exact number maybe 10”(LLA(f)), "I am sure I have more than 10" (LLE (f)), “I have more than 10” (LLI(f)), “I have so many contacts on my phone, surely more than 30” (LLO(f)), “I definitely have more than 30”(LLU(f)), “I would have had so many but I realized the danger of that so I have just about 10 contacts which are my relatives, friends and my boy friend ”(LLY(f)), “I have about 20 contacts”(LLA(m)), “I don't have many contacts on my phone, I am sure just

between 5 to 10”(LLE(m)), “there are about 5 to 10 contacts” (LUI(m)), “I have many”(LUO(m)), “Between 10 to 15”(LLU(m)), “about 20 or more”(LLY(m)).

To the third questions, answers were as follows: "yes"(LLA(f)), "yes" (LLE (f)), “Yes” (LLI(f)), “not always” (LLO(f)), “yes”(LLU(f)), “not always”(LLY(f)), “yes” (LLA(m)), “yes”(LLE(m))”, “I thinks it possible, yes”(LLI(m)), “not always”(LLO(m)), “yes”(LLU(m)), “sometimes”(LLY(m)).

To question 4, the answers were as follows: "the majority" (LLA(f)), “the majority " (LLE (f)), “the majority” (LLI(f)), “the majority” (LLO(f)), “the majority”(LLU(f)), “the majority”( LLY(f)), “neutral” (LLA(m)), “the minority”(LLE(m))”, “the minority”( LLI(m)), “the minority”( LLO(m)), “the minority”(LLU(m)), “neutral”(LLY(m)).

To question 5, answers were as follows: "always" (LLA(f)), “often" (LLE (f)), “often” (LLI(f)), “always” (LLO(f)), “often”(LLU(f)), “often”(LLY(f)), “sometimes” (LLA(m)), “sometimes”(LLE(m))”, “sometimes”(LLI(m)), “sometimes”(LLO(m)), “often”(LLU(m)), “sometimes”(LLY(m)).

To the sixth question, answers were: "yes" (LLA(f)), “yes" (LLE (f)), “yes” (LLI(f)), “yes” (LLO(f)), “yes”(LLU(f)), “yes”(LLY(f)), “yes” (LLA(m)), “yes”(LLE(m))”, “yes”(LLI(m)), “yes”(LLO(m)), “yes”(LLU(m)), “yes”(LLY(m)).

To the seventh question, responses were: "yes" (LLA(f)), “yes" (LLE (f)), “yes” (LLI(f)), “yes” (LLO(f)), “yes”(LLU(f)), “yes”(LLY(f)), “yes” (LLA(m)), “yes”(LLE(m))”, “yes”(LLI(m)), “yes”(LLO(m)), “yes”(LLU(m)), “yes”(LLY(m)).

To the eighth question, answers were: "sometimes" (LLA(f)), “sometimes" (LLE (f)), “when it is necessary” (LLI(f)), “sometimes” (LLO(f)), “sometimes”(LLU(f)), “sometimes”(LLY(f)), “sometimes” (LLA(m)), “sometimes”(LLE(m))”, “sometimes”(LLI(m)), “sometimes”(LLO(m)), “sometimes”(LLU(m)), “sometimes”(LLY(m)).

To the ninth question, answers were as follows: "often" (LLA(f)), “often" (LLE (f)), “often” (LLI(f)), “often” (LLO(f)), “always”(MLU(f)), “often”(LLY(f)), “sometimes” (LLA(m)), “sometimes”(LLE(m))”, “sometimes”(LLI(m)), “sometimes”(LLO(m)), “often”(LLU(m)), “sometimes”(LLY(m)).

## UPPER SIXTH LBA

For participants from upper sixth, their answers, especially those from improvised questions differed greatly from responses by participants from lower sixth at LBA. To begin with the nine main questions, answers were as follows: "I started using the mobile phone

when I was in lower sixth class and since then I have never been without a phone" (LUA(f)), "I like texting my friends and chatting with my friends on Facebook, I use the mobile phone to do all these so I can't stay without having one" (LUE (f)), "I have one" (LUI(f)), "Its a very important device, thus I have one" (LUO(f)), "I have one"(LUU(f)), "It helps me to stay connected with my friends, thus I have it"(LUI(f)), "I have one(LUA(m)), "It is difficult to stay without it, thus I have one"(LUE(m))", "It's my companion and I have it all the time"(LUO(m)), "I have one"(LUU(m)), "I a mobile phone of course"(LUI(m)).

To the second question, responses were as follows: "I have about 15"(LUA(f)), "About 5 to10" (LUE (f)), "I have about 10 to 15 contacts" (LUI(f)), "I don't know the exact number" (LUO(f)), about 5 to 10"(LUU(f)), "I don't know how many exactly but I believe more than 10"(LUI(f)), "probably more than 10"(LUA(m)), "I don't store a lot of numbers of on my phone, thus I only have contacts of few friends and relatives"(LUE(m)), "about 5 to 10 contacts" (LUI(m)), "I have many"(LUO(m)), "bout 15 to 20"(LUU(m)), "ABOUT 10"(LUI(m)).

To the third questions, answers were as follows: "yes"(LUA(f)), "yes" (LUE (f)), "Yes" (LUI(f)), "yes" (LUO(f)), "yes"(LUU(f)), "yes"(LUI(f)), "yes" (LUA(m)), "yes"(LUE(m))", "it is possible"(LUI(m)), "possible"(LUO(m)), "possible"(LUU(m)), "yes indeed"(LUI(m)).

To question 4, the answers were as follows: "majority" (LUA(f)), "majority " (LUE (f)), "majority" (LUI(f)), "majority" (LUO(f)), "majority"(LUU(f)), "the majority"(LUI(f)), "rarely" (LUA(m)), "the minority"(LUE(m))", "the minority"(LUI(m)), "the minority"(LUO(m)), "the minority"(LUU(m)), "minority"(LUI(m)).

To question 5, answers were as follows: "often" (LUA(f)), "often" (LUE (f)), "often" (LUI(f)), "often" (LUO(f)), "always"(LUU(f)), "often"(LUI(f)), "sometimes" (LUA(m)), "sometimes"(LUE(m))", "sometimes"(LUI(m)), "sometimes"(LUO(m)), "sometimes"(LUU(m)), "sometimes"(LUI(m)).

To the sixth question, answers were: "yes" (LUA(f)), "yes" (LUE (f)), "yes" (LUI(f)), "yes" (LUO(f)), "yes"(LUU(f)), "yes"(LUI(f)), "yes" (LUA(m)), "yes"(LUE(m))", "yes"(LUI(m)), "yes"(LUO(m)), "yes"(LUU(m)), "yes"(LUI(m)).

To the seventh question, responses were: "previously" (LUA(f)), "I had a few months ago" (LUE(f)), "yes" (LUI(f)), "last I had" (LUO(f)), "yes"(LUU(f)), "yes"(LUI(f)), "yes" (LUA(m)), "yes"(LUE(m))", "last year I had"(LUI(m)), "yes"(LUO(m)), "yes"(LUU(m)), "yes"(LUI(m)).

To the eighth question, answers were: "sometimes" (LUA(f)), "sometimes" (LUE (f)), "sometimes" (LUI(f)), "sometimes" (LUO(f)), "sometimes"(LUU(f)), "sometimes"(LUY(f)), "sometimes" (LUA(m)), "sometimes"(LUE(m))", "sometimes"(LUI(m)), "sometimes"(LUO(m)), "sometimes"(LUU(m)), "sometimes"(LUY(m)).

To the ninth question, answers were as follows: "always" (LUA(f)), "always" (LUE (f)), "always" (LUI(f)), "always" (LUO(f)), "often"(LUU(f)), "always"(LUY(f)), "sometimes" (LUA(m)), "sometimes"(LUE(m))", "sometimes"(LUI(m)), "sometimes"(LUO(m)), "sometimes"(LUU(m)), "sometimes"(LUY(m)).

### **LOWER SIXTH LYCEE D'EFOULAN**

This section comprises data from focus group discussions at Lycée d'Efoulan. After the first questions was asked, lower sixth participants had the following responses: "sure, I have a mobile phone" (ELA(f)), "I have one" (ELE (f)), "I always have" (ELI(f)), "I have a mobile phone" (ELO(f)), "I have one"(LLU(f)), "I have a mobile phone"(ELY(f)), "I would hardly stay without having one" (ELA(m)), "yes I do have one"(ELE(m))", "I have"(ELI(m)), "I have one"(ELO(m)), "my companion all the time, thus I definitely have one"(ELY(m)).

Responses from the second question were as follows: "Maybe 10 or more"(ELA(f)), "more than 10 I think" (ELE (f)), "between 5 to 10" (ELI(f)), "many but I don't know the exact amount" (ELO(f)), "about 10"(ELU(f)), "I have very few contacts I would say just about 6"(ELY(f)), "between 10 to 20 contacts"(ELA(m)), "I have about 5 to 10"(ELE(m)), "5 to 10 contacts" (EUI(m)), "about 10 to 15"(EUO(m)), "about 10 to 15"(ELU(m)), "about 10"(ELY(m)).

Responses for the third question were as follows: "sometimes"(ELA(f)), "yes" (ELE (f)), "not quite" (ELI(f)), "it is possible" (ELO(f)), "yes"ELU(f)), "not always"(ELY(f)), "yes" (ELA(m)), "yes"(ELE(m))", "possible"(ELI(m)), "possible"(ELO(m)), "yes"(ELU(m)), "possible"(ELY(m)).

To the forth question, answers were: "the majority" (ELA(f)), "the majority " (ELE (f)), "the majority" (ELI(f)), "the majority" (ELO(f)), "the majority"(ELU(f)), "the majority"(ELY(f)), "the minority"(ELA(m)), "the minority"(ELE(m))", "the minority"(ELI(m)), "the minority"(ELO(m)), "the minority"(ELU(m)), "the minority"(ELY(m)).

To question 5, answers were as follows: "always" (LLA(f)), "often" (LLE (f)), "often" (LLI(f)), "always" (LLO(f)), "often"(LLU(f)), "often"(LLY(f)), "sometimes" (LLA(m)),

“sometimes”(LLE(m))”, “sometimes”(LLI(m)), “sometimes”(LLO(m)), “often”(LLU(m)), “sometimes”(LLY(m)).

Answers from the sixth question were: "yes" (LLA(f)), “yes” (LLE (f)), “yes” (LLI(f)), “yes” (LLO(f)), “yes”(LLU(f)), “yes”(LLY(f)), “yes” (LLA(m)), “yes”(LLE(m))”, “yes”(LLI(m)), “yes”(LLO(m)), “yes”(LLU(m)), “yes”(LLY(m)).

Responses from question 7 were as follows: "yes I had just one because he was so kind to me, he provided me with things I needed which I couldn't afford and also took me to leisure trips, especially to places like Kribi and Limbe which I couldn't afford to pay" (ELA(f)), “I also like going to the beaches and I have had men who took me to Limbe” (ELE (f)), “yes” (ELI(f)), “yes” (ELO(f)), “yes”(ELU(f)), “yes”(ELY(f)), “yes” (ELA(m)), “yes”(ELE(m))”, “yes”(ELI(m)), “yes”(ELO(m)), “yes”(ELU(m)), “yes”(ELY(m)).

Answers to question 8 were: "sometimes" (ELA(f)), “sometimes” (ELE (f)), “when it is necessary” (ELI(f)), “sometimes” (ELO(f)), “sometimes”(ELU(f)), “sometimes”(ELY(f)), “sometimes” (ELA(m)), “sometimes”(ELE(m))”, “sometimes”(ELI(m)), “sometimes”(ELO(m)), “sometimes”(ELU(m)), “sometimes”(ELY(m)).

To the ninth question, answers were as follows: "often" (ELA(f)), “always” (ELE (f)), “always” (ELI(f)), “always” (ELO(f)), “always”(ELU(f)), “always”(ELY(f)), “sometimes” (ELA(m)), “sometimes”(ELE(m))”, “sometimes”(ELI(m)), “sometimes”(ELO(m)), “often”(ELU(m)), “sometimes”(LLY(m)).

## UPPER SIXTH LYCEE D'EFOULAN

The next section include answers from participants in upper sixth class at Lycée d'Efoulan. To question (of the nine questions) participants responded as follows: "I have a mobile phone"(EUA(f)), "I use the phone to connect with friends and when I am without one, I feel uncomfortable" (EUE (f)), “I definitely have one” (EUI(f)), “a tool to make people stay connect and I have one” (EUO(f)), “I have one”(EUU(f)), “I have one”(EUY(f)), “I have one”(EUA(m)), “I have one”(EUE(m))”, “of course I have one”(EUO(m)), “I have one”(EUU(m)), “I have one”(EUY(m)).

To the second question, responses were as follows: "about 5 or more”(LUA(f)), "about 10" (EUE (f)), “I think I have about 15 contacts” (EUI(f)), “I don't know the exact number” (EUO(f)), about 5 to 10”(EUU(f)), “about 10”(EUY(f)), “more than 15”(EUA(m)), “I don't store a lot of numbers of on my phone, thus I only have contacts of few friends and relatives”(EUE(m)), “about 5 to 10 contacts” (EUI(m)), “I have many”(EUO(m)), “about 5 to 10”(EUU(m)), “about 10”(EUY(m)).

To the third questions, answers were as follows: "it is possible"(EUA(f)), "it depends" (EUE (f)), "it is possible" (EUI(f)), "yes I think so" (EUO(f)), "yes"(ELU(f)), "yes"(EUY(f)), "yes" (EUA(m)), "possible"(EUE(m))", "possible"(EUI(m)), "possible"(EUO(m)), "possible"(EUU(m)), "possible"(EUY(m)).

To question 4, the answers were as follows: "the majority" (EUA(f)), "the majority " (EUE (f)), "majority" (EUI(f)), "majority" (EUO(f)), "majority"(EUU(f)), "the majority"(EUY(f)), "the minority"(EUA(m)), "the minority"(EUE(m))", "the minority"(EUI(m)), "the minority"(EUO(m)), "the minority"(EUU(m)), "minority"(EUY(m)).

To question 5, answers were as follows: "always" (EUA(f)), "always" (EUE (f)), "always" (EUI(f)), "often" (EUO(f)), "always"(EUU(f)), "always"(EUY(f)), "sometimes" (EUA(m)), "sometimes"(EUE(m))", "sometimes"(EUI(m)), "sometimes"(EUO(m)), "sometimes"(EUU(m)), "sometimes"(EUY(m)).

To the sixth question, answers were: "yes" (LUA(f)), "yes" (LUE (f)), "yes" (LUI(f)), "yes" (LUO(f)), "yes"(LUU(f)), "yes"(LUY(f)), "yes" (LUA(m)), "yes"(LUE(m))", "yes"(LUI(m)), "yes"(LUO(m)), "yes"(LUU(m)), "yes"(LUY(m)).

To the seventh question, responses were: "yes" (LUA(f)), "yes" (LUE(f)), "yes" (LUI(f)), "last I had" (LUO(f)), "yes"(LUU(f)), "yes"(LUY(f)), "yes" (LUA(m)), "yes"(LUE(m))", "yes"(LUI(m)), "yes"(LUO(m)), "yes"(LUU(m)), "yes"(LUY(m)).

To the eighth question, answers were: "sometimes" (LUA(f)), "sometimes" (LUE (f)), "sometimes" (LUI(f)), "sometimes" (LUO(f)), "sometimes"(LUU(f)), "sometimes"(LUY(f)), "sometimes" (LUA(m)), "sometimes"(LUE(m))", "sometimes"(LUI(m)), "sometimes"(LUO(m)), "sometimes"(LUU(m)), "sometimes"(LUY(m)).

To the ninth question, answers were as follows: "sometimes" (MUA(f)), "always" (MUE (f)), "sometimes" (MUI(f)), "always" (MUO(f)), "often"(MUU(f)), "always"(MUY(f)), "sometimes" (MUA(m)), "sometimes"(MUE(m))", "sometimes"(MUI(m)), "sometimes"(MUO(m)), "sometimes"(MUU(m)), "sometimes"(MUY(m)).





## ANNEXE 2

### GhentQuestionnaires

We duly appreciate your effort to participate in answering these questions. Our aim is to examine how students use mobile phones and how usage can give us an insight into their sexual culture. We assure you that answers provided will strictly remain anonymous so that you will not be associated with them. Thus, your names will not be identified through any form of information, especially as these will be coded. You are free to withdraw from participation and also free to ignore any question(s) that you do not want to answer. This questionnaire is part of the research that has been approved by my supervisor Prof. dr. Koen Stroeken. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions, suggestions etc. at [ntiegemesumbe.ngadeivo@ugent.be](mailto:ntiegemesumbe.ngadeivo@ugent.be)

<b>Home *</b>	<hr/>
The floor*	<hr/>
Room number*	<hr/>
Duration at Ugent*	<hr/>

BI : BACKGROUND INFORMATION		
BI1	Age : (A) < 18 (B) 18 - 25 (C) 25>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BI2	Gender: (A) Male (B) Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
BI3	Institution: (A) UGhent(B) Other educational institution (C) None	<input type="checkbox"/>
BI4	Nationality: (A) Belgian (B) Other (specify).....	<input type="checkbox"/>
BI5	Religion: (A) Christianity (B) Islam (C) None (D) Other (specify).....	<input type="checkbox"/>
BI6	Mother tongue: (A) Dutch (B) French (C) English (D) Other.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
BI7	Profession of parent(s) :.....	
MPASNS : MOBILE PHONE AS SOCIAL NETWORKING SERVICE		
MPA SNS 1	One of the popular social networking service for youths nowadays is the Mobile Phone, do you have one ? (A) Yes (B) No	<input type="checkbox"/>
MPA SNS 2	Number of contacts on your mobile phone who tried to solicit sex? (A) <10 (B) +10<20 (C) +20 <30 (D) >30	<input type="checkbox"/>

MPA SNS 3	Among the list of contacts in MPASNS2, how many send you an sms daily ? (A) 1-5 (B) 6-10 (C) 11 or more	<input type="checkbox"/>
MPA SNS 4	Do you think a gift can influence sex ? (A) Yes (B) No	<input type="checkbox"/>
MPA SNS 5	Among the sms you receive per day, how many messages are expressing romantic feelings (A) the majority. (B) about fifty fifty. (C) the minority. (D) rarely if ever.	<input type="checkbox"/>
MPA SNS 6	How many of the sms come from within your building ? A. the majority. (B). about fifty fifty.(C) the minority. (D) rarely if ever.	<input type="checkbox"/>
MPA SNS 7	How many of the sms come from friends in school ? (A) the majority (B) about fifty fifty (C) the minority (D) rarely if ever	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>FM : FRIENDSHIP MAPPING</b>		
FM1	Do you have friends ? (A) Yes (B) No	<input type="checkbox"/>
FM2	Do you know how many in total ? (A) Just one (B) Two friends (C) More than two (D) Many ! I can't know the exact number friends you have	<input type="checkbox"/>
FM3	What is the composure of your friendship (A) Males and females (B) Only females (C) Only males	<input type="checkbox"/>
FM4	Do you have a best friend amongst your friends ? (A) Yes (B) No	<input type="checkbox"/>

FM5	If you say YES in FM4, why is that person your best friend . Because he/she is (A) sexual partner (B) Supports me materially and financially (C) Advice (D) Other (specify).....	_
FM6	Do you remember when you started your present sexual relation ? How many (Mention the duration using : W M Y, for example if your relationship has lasted only for two weeks, two months or two years, then fill in 2W, 2M, 2Y. W- Weeks, M – Months, Y -Years	_
FM7	Before your present sexual partner, did you have another before ? (A) Yes (B) No	_
FM8	Could you estimate the number of people you had a sexual Relationship with in your life? (A) 0. (B) <5. (C) +5<10. (D) >10.	_
FM9	Who visits you most (A) Best friend (B) Boy/Girl friend (C) Family member (C) Sponsor (D) Teacher	_
FM10	Your best friends live in (A) Same student building (B) Different student building (C) Off student campus building	_
<b>YCS : YOUTH CULTURE SURVEY</b>		
YCS		_

1	As youth, you frequently associate yourself with youth social network spaces. In Ghent, bars, nightclubs, school campus and eating spots, room socialisation are usual social network spaces. Which of these are you more familiar with ? (A) Bar (B) Night club (C) Eating sport (D) room socialisation (E) Eating spot (F) Other (mention).....	
YCS 2	How often do you frequent these spaces (A) Everyday (B) Twice a week (C) More than two times in a week	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 3	During your socialisation at this spaces, what are common topics of your youth behavior (A) Dating (B) Sexual relation (C) Advice (D) Gossip (E) Other (mention).....	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 4	With whom do you often go together at your usual social network space ? (A) Boy friend/Girl friend B. Sugar daddy (C) Any friend of mine (D) Other (mention) .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 5	Do you discuss about the use of condoms with sexual partners ? (A) Yes (B) No	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 6	If yes, what type of sexual partner? (A) Casual(A) (B) Intimate (C) Sugar daddy & mummies (D) All the three	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 7	Do you advice your friends to use a condom during sex? (A) Yes, (B) No	
YCS 8	If yes, what type of sexual partners would you advice them to use condom ( (A) Intimate (B) Casual (C) Sugar daddies & mummies	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 9	Does your friends advice you to use condoms? (A) Yes (No)	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 10	When socializing (e.g. when partying), do you drink alcohol ? (A) Yes (B) No	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 11	When socializing (e.g. when partying) do you smoke? (A) Yes (B) No	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 12	What is your attitude to sexuality: please score the following statements about your attitude on a scale of 1 to 5	

	<p>A.sex is impossible for me outside a steady relationship</p> <p>1.fully disagree – 2.rather disagree – 3.neutral –4.rather agree – 5.fully agree</p> <p>B.sex is like eating or drinking</p> <p>1.fully disagree –2. rather disagree –3. neutral – 4.rather agree – 5.fully agree</p> <p>C.Intimacy is necessary in a sexual Relationship</p> <p>1.fully disagree – 2.rather disagree – 3.neutral – 4.rather agree – 5.fully agree</p> <p>D. I am unhappy without regular sexual contact</p> <p>1. fully disagree 2. rather disagree 3. neutral 4. rather agree 5. fully agree</p>	<p> _  </p> <p> _  </p> <p> _  </p> <p> _  </p>
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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME**

## ANNEXE 3

### Yaoundé questionnaires

We duly appreciate your effort to participate in answering these questions. Our aim is to examine how students use mobile phones and how usage can give us an insight into their sexual culture. We assure you that answers provided will strictly remain anonymous so that you will not be associated with them. Thus, your names will not be identified through any form of information, especially as these will be coded. You are free to withdraw from participation and also free to ignore any question(s) that you do not want to answer. This questionnaire is part of the research that has been approved by my supervisor Prof. dr. Koen Stroeken. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions, suggestions etc. at

[ntiegemesumbe.ngadeivo@ugent.be](mailto:ntiegemesumbe.ngadeivo@ugent.be)

<b>Mini cité *</b>	_____
The floor*	_____
Room number*	_____
Duration at Yaoundé 1 University or Yaoundé 2 University*	_____

BI : BACKGROUND INFORMATION		
BI1	Age : (A) < 18 (B) 18 - 25 (C) 25>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BI2	Gender: (A) Male (B) Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
BI3	Institution: (A) Yaoundé 1 University (B) Yaoundé 2 University	<input type="checkbox"/>
BI4	Nationality: (A) Cameroonian (B) Other (specify).....	<input type="checkbox"/>
BI5	Religion: (A) Christianity (B) Islam (C) None (D) Other (specify).....	<input type="checkbox"/>
BI6	Language: (A) English (B) (D) Other.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
BI7	Parents' occupation: (A) Farming (B) Business (C) Civil Servants	<input type="checkbox"/>
MPASNS : MOBILE PHONE AS SOCIAL NETWORKING SERVICE		
MPA SNS 1	One of the popular social networking service for youths nowadays is the Mobile Phone, do you have one ? (A) Yes (B) No	<input type="checkbox"/>
MPA SNS 2	Number of contacts on your mobile phone who tried to solicit sex? (A) <10 (B) +10<20 (C) +20 <30 (D) >30	<input type="checkbox"/>
MPA	Among the list of contacts in MPASNS2, how many send you an sms daily ? (A) 1-5	<input type="checkbox"/>



SNS 3	(B) 6-10 (C) 11 or more	
MPA SNS 4	Do you think a gift can influence sex ? (A) Yes (B) No	<input type="checkbox"/>
MPA SNS 5	Among the sms you receive per day, how many messages are expressing romantic feelings (A) the majority. (B) about fifty fifty. (C) the minority. (D) rarely if ever.	<input type="checkbox"/>
MPA SNS 6	How many of the sms come from within your building ? A. the majority. (B). about fifty fifty.(C) the minority. (D) rarely if ever.	<input type="checkbox"/>
MPA SNS 7	How many of the sms come from friends in school ? (A) the majority (B) about fifty fifty (C) the minority (D) rarely if ever	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>FM : FRIENDSHIP MAPPING</b>		
FM1	Do you have friends ? (A) Yes (B) No	<input type="checkbox"/>
FM2	Do you know how many in total ? (A) Just one (B) Two friends (C) More than two (D) Many ! I can't know the exact number friends you have	<input type="checkbox"/>
FM3	What is the composure of your friendship (A) Males and females (B) Only females (C) Only males	<input type="checkbox"/>
FM4	Do you have a best friend amongst your friends ? (A) Yes (B) No	<input type="checkbox"/>

FM5	If you say YES in FM4, why is that person your best friend . Because he/she is (A) sexual partner (B) Supports me materially and financially (C) Advice (D) Other (specify).....	<input type="checkbox"/>
FM6	Do you remember when you started your present sexual relation ? How many (Mention the duration using : W M Y, for example if your relationship has lasted only for two weeks, two months or two years, then fill in 2W, 2M, 2Y. W- Weeks, M – Months, Y -Years	<input type="checkbox"/>
FM7	Before your present sexual partner, did you have another before ? (A) Yes (B) No	<input type="checkbox"/>
FM8	Could you estimate the number of people you had a sexual Relationship with in your life? (A) 0. (B) <5. (C) +5<10. (D) >10.	<input type="checkbox"/>
FM9	Who visits you most (A) Best friend (B) Boy/Girl friend (C) Family member (C) Sponsor (D) Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>
FM10	Your best friends live in (A) Same student building (B) Different student building (C) Off student campus building	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>YCS : YOUTH CULTURE SURVEY</b>		
YCS1	As youth, you frequently associate yourself with youth social network spaces. In Ghent,	<input type="checkbox"/>

	bars, nightclubs, school campus and eating spots, room socialisation are usual social network spaces. Which of these are you more familiar with ? (A) Bar (B) Night club (C) Eating sport (D) room socialisation (E) Eating spot (F) Other (mention).....	
YCS 2	How often do you frequent these spaces (A) Everyday (B) Twice a week (C) More than two times in a week	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 3	During your socialisation at this spaces, what are common topics of your youth behavior (A) Dating (B) Sexual relation (C) Advice (D) Gossip (E) Other (mention).....	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 4	With whom do you often go together at your usual social network space ? (A) Boy friend/Girl friend B. Sugar daddy (C) Any friend of mine (D) Other (mention) .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 5	Do you discuss about the use of condoms with sexual partners ? (A) Yes (B) No	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 6	If yes, what type of sexual partner? (A) Casual(A) (B) Intimate (C) Sugar daddy & mummies (D) All the three	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 7	Do you advice your friends to use a condom during sex? (A) Yes, (B) No	
YCS 8	If yes, what type of sexual partners would you advice them to use condom ( (A) Intimate (B) Casual (C) Sugar daddies & mummies	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 9	Does your friends advice you to use condoms? (A) Yes (No)	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 10	When socializing (e.g. when partying), do you drink alcohol ? (A) Yes (B) No	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 11	When socializing (e.g. when partying) do you smoke? (A) Yes (B) No	<input type="checkbox"/>
YCS 12	What is your attitude to sexuality: please score the following statements about your attitude on a scale of 1 to 5 A.sex is impossible for me outside a steady relationship	

	1.fully disagree – 2.rather disagree – 3.neutral –4.rather agree – 5.fully agree	<input type="checkbox"/>
	B.sex is like eating or drinking	
	1.fully disagree –2. rather disagree –3. neutral – 4.rather agree – 5.fully agree	<input type="checkbox"/>
	C.Intimacy is necessary in a sexual Relationship	
	1.fully disagree – 2.rather disagree – 3.neutral – 4.rather agree – 5.fully agree	
	D. I am unhappy without regular sexual contact	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1. fully disagree 2. rather disagree 3. neutral 4. rather agree 5. fully agree	<input type="checkbox"/>

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME**

## ANNEXE 4

Sample authorizations (1) to collect data at ENS Yaoundé and (2) to use Yaoundé 1 Library

<b>UNIVERSITÉ DE YAOUNDÉ I</b> <b>ÉCOLE NORMALE SUPÉRIEURE</b> BP : 47 Yaoundé Tél : 22-23 – 12 – 15 N° 10 / - 2 2 4 6 UYI/ENS/D/DE/m.m.m		<b>RÉPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN</b> Paix – Travail – Patrie  Yaoundé, le <b>29 DEC 2010</b>
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**LE DIRECTEUR**

À  
**Monsieur NGADE IVO NTIEGE MESUMBE**  
**Étudiant Doctorant, Université de Gand**

Objet :  *votre autorisation a/s  
de la collecte des données à l'ENS*

Monsieur,

Par correspondance datée du 05 décembre 2010, vous avez bien voulu me saisir aux fins de mener vos recherches à l'ENS, notamment la collecte des données dans le cadre de vos études doctorales en Anthropologie médicale.

Y faisant suite, j'ai l'honneur de vous marquer mon accord de principe pour votre collecte des données. Vous voudrez toutefois prendre l'attache du Directeur des Études pour les modalités pratiques.

Veuillez agréer, Monsieur, l'expression de ma parfaite considération.

Copies :

- DE/ENS ;
- Chefs de départements ;
- CSS ;
- Intéressé ;
- Chrono.


  
  
**Nicolas Gabriel ANDJIGA**  
**Professeur**

Fig 1: Authorization letter from the Director of studies Ecole Normale Supérieure Yaoundé – Cameroun

UNIVERSITE DE YAOUNDE I  
The University of Yaoundé I

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Central Library

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B.P. 1312 Yaoundé Tél. 22.06.47.28

[Bibliotheque@uyi.uninet.cm](mailto:Bibliotheque@uyi.uninet.cm)



REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN  
Republic of Cameroon

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Paix – Travail – Patrie  
Peace – Work – Fatherland

\*\*\*\*\*

Yaoundé, le 27 OCT. 2010

Le Conservateur en chef

N° 049 /UYI/BU/CC/pt

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**NOM ET PRENOM : M. NGADE Ivo NTIEGE MESUMBE**

**FONCTION : Etudiant Doctorant – Département langue et culture africaine à  
l'Université de Gand**

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Le Conservateur en chef

  
  
**Dr. Alexis Eyangou Moussa**  
Chargé de Cours

**NB : La période de validité de ce document ne peut excéder trois (3) mois.**

Fig 2: Access to library authorization – Yaoundé 1 University

